Veitchia merrillii
Christmas Palm

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

INTRODUCTION

This stocky, single-trunked palm with stiffly arched, six-foot-long, bright green fronds is noted for the fall and winter appearance of the very showy clusters of glossy, bright red fruits which hang below the leaves at the base of the crown shaft (Fig. 1). Reaching 25 feet in height, though often much smaller, Christmas Palm has a very neat appearance and is well-suited to use as a patio, terrace, specimen, or framing tree. Unfortunately, the palm is very susceptible to lethal yellowing disease and probably should not be planted. Fortunately, there are other Veitchia resistant to the disease, including Veitchia macdanialsi and Veitchia montgumeryana, but these are much taller palms with thicker trunks.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: Veitchia merrillii
Pronunciation: VEE-chee-uh mer-RILL-ee-eye
Common name(s): Christmas Palm, Manila Palm
Family: Arecaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: container or above-ground planter; suitable for growing indoors; near a deck or patio; specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance
Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

Figure 1. Middle-aged Christmas Palm.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 20 to 30 feet
Spread: 10 to 15 feet

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Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms
Crown shape: palm; upright
Crown density: open
Growth rate: medium
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate; spiral
Leaf type: odd pinnately compound
Leaflet margin: entire
Leaflet shape: lanceolate
Leaflet venation: parallel
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaflet blade length: 12 to 18 inches; 8 to 12 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white; yellow
Flower characteristics: inconspicuous and not showy; summer flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval
Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: red
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; persistent on the tree; showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: grow mostly upright and will not droop; showy trunk; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns
Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Crown shaft: yes
Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun
Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained
Drought tolerance: moderate
Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem
Winter interest: tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers
Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: not known to be susceptible
Pest resistance: very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect tree health or aesthetics

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Christmas Palm should receive some shade while young but will grow in full sun when older on a wide variety of well-drained soils, including limestone soils. Trees should only be used in frost-free areas. Consider substituting one of the Veitchia mentioned above, the Carpentaria Palm, Ptychosperma macarthuri, or a variety of other palms resistant to lethal yellowing disease.

Propagation is by seed.

Pests

Scales can infest and spoil young palms.

Diseases

It is very susceptible to lethal yellowing disease.