INTRODUCTION

Commonly seen at 40 to 50 feet but capable of soaring to 80 feet in height, Desert Fan Palm is quickly recognized as related to the much-overused, straight, single-trunked street palm of years past, Washingtonia robusta (Fig. 1). However, Desert Fan Palm is better suited to the home landscape since it grows more slowly and is shorter. This also allows it to be used in more garden applications, such as containers or grouped together as a mass planting. It does not grow well when it is over-irrigated in Florida because it frequently develops trunk or root rot.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: Washingtonia filifera
Pronunciation: wosh-ing-TOE-nee-uh fill-LIFF-er-uh
Common name(s): Desert Palm, California Washingtonia Palm
Family: Arecaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 9 through 11 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

DESCRIPTION

Height: 40 to 60 feet
Spread: 10 to 15 feet
Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more

Figure 1. Middle-aged Desert Palm.

or less identical crown forms
Crown shape: palm; upright
Crown density: open
Growth rate: medium
Texture: coarse
Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Foliage**

- **Leaf arrangement:** alternate; spiral
- **Leaf type:** costapalmate
- **Leaf margin:** entire
- **Leaf shape:** star-shaped
- **Leaf venation:** palmate
- **Leaf type and persistence:** broadleaf evergreen; evergreen
- **Leaf blade length:** >36 inches
- **Leaf color:** green
- **Fall color:** no fall color change
- **Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

**Trunk and Branches**

- **Trunk/bark/branches:** grow mostly upright and will not droop; not particularly showy; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns
- **Pruning requirement:** requires pruning to develop strong structure
- **Breakage:** resistant
- **Crown shaft:** no

**Culture**

- **Light requirement:** tree grows in full sun
- **Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; well-drained
- **Drought tolerance:** high
- **Aerosol salt tolerance:** moderate
Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: No entries found.
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: not known to be susceptible
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

USE AND MANAGEMENT

The lower leaves persist on the tree after they die, forming a dense, brown, shaggy covering below the living, grey/green, broad, fan-shaped leaves, giving it the common name of Petticoat Palm. These dead fronds are known to be a fire hazard and a popular bedding roost for rodents and, because of this, must be removed by law in some areas.

Plant this palm only on soil which is extremely well-drained to prevent trunk or root rot. Moderate salt tolerance allows it to be used close to the coast in several of the southern states. This palm could be tried more in well-drained sites as a replacement for Washingtonia robusta which grows very tall with a skinny trunk. But over-irrigation and rainy weather could initiate root rot. Washingtonia filifera is shorter, has a thicker trunk, and is better suited for planting in dry urban landscapes, such as in Texas, Arizona and California. They reportedly suffer and often die from root rot when irrigated. Select Washingtonia robusta in an irrigated landscape and for the eastern U.S.

Propagation is by seed.

Pests

Scales while young, palm weevil in old age, palm leaf skeletonizer and a variety of scales at any time can infest this palm.

Diseases

Trunk or root rot in wet soils may infect this tree.