

Pruning shade trees in the landscape

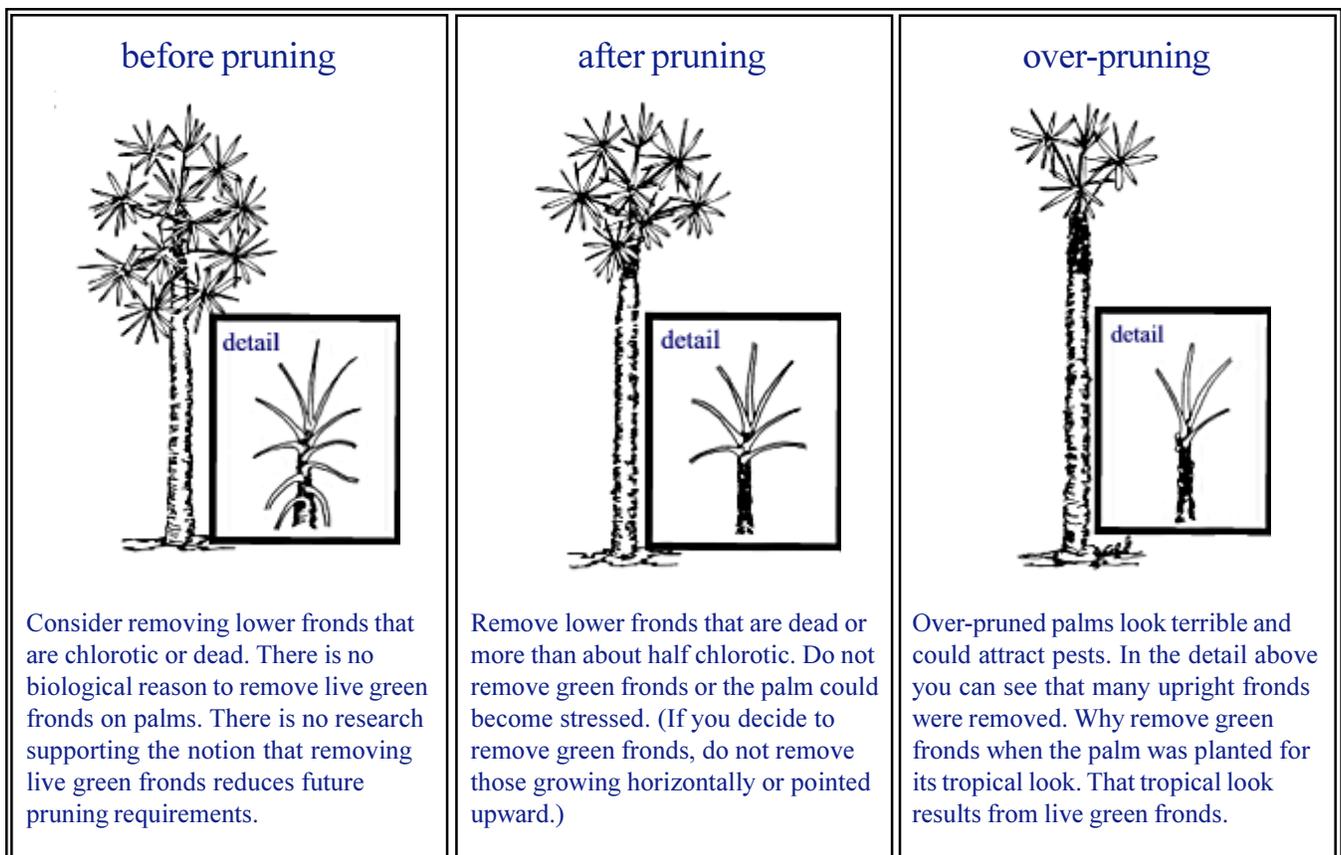
Pruning palms

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Introduction: Palms and cycads are often thought of as low maintenance plants; however, most palms require regular pruning to keep them attractive and safe. Many palms maintain a set number of live fronds. A regular turnover of foliage occurs as dying lower fronds are replaced by new ones at the apex. These dead fronds are not detrimental to the health of the tree. If there is an excessive number of older yellow fronds determine the cause before pruning. There could be a severe nutrient problem, caused by a potassium or magnesium deficiency, that could worsen if the palm is pruned or fertilized with high nitrogen or the wrong type of fertilizer.

There are several reasons for pruning palms **1)** Removing dead and dying lower fronds improves the appearance of a palm. **2)** Dead and dying fronds and loose petioles are weakly attached to some palms and can place people and property at risk should they fall from tall palms. People have been severely injured by falling fronds. Dead and dying palm fronds should be removed regularly to reduce this risk. **3)** Pruning can remove fruit clusters, especially in public landscapes where falling fruit and flower debris can be messy as well as hazardous. Some palms generate copious amounts of seedlings near the plant. Removing flowers or fruit reduces the number of potential seedlings. **4)** Remove sprouts from the base of the trunk.

Objectives: **1)** Remove dead and dying fronds and developing flowers and fruits to reduce risk and enhance aesthetics; **2)** remove sprouts or stems to maintain one trunk.



Execution: It is preferable not to remove live, healthy fronds. If they must be removed, however, avoid removing fronds that are growing horizontally or those growing upward. Fronds removed should be severed close to the petiole base without damaging living trunk tissue. There is little reason to shave or sand the trunk smooth. The pineapple shape crafted at the base of date palms is not necessary for good health of the palm.

Further information:

- 1) Gilman, E.F. 2002. Illustrated guide to pruning, second edition. Delmar Publishers, Albany, NY. 330pp.
- 2) Gilman, E.F. 2001. Illustrated pruning and planting CDROM. Horticoopia, Inc., Purcellville, VA.
- 3) American National Standards Institute (ANSI A300). 1995. *American National Standard for Tree Care Operations – Tree, Shrub and Other Woody Plant Maintenance – Standard Practices*. New York: American National Standards Institute.

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