

TREETISE

SUMMER 2010

Palms Aplenty

ROOTED IN KNOWLEDGE

VOLUME 2 | ISSUE 3

As residents of Southern California we have the opportunity to enjoy a wide variety of tree species, but one seems to stand out above the rest: Palms. Palms are fascinating trees to work with and often elicit a plethora of questions for arborists. Questions ranging from, “What kind of Palm is this?” to “Why are the leaves yellow? Is it dying?” As professional arborists it is our responsibility to know as much as possible about the trees we work with, the care they require and the hazards they pose so we can help create an enjoyable urban forest.

Palms are in a class of plants called Monocots, which includes such relatives as corn, onions, tulips and even some kinds of turf grass. The reason Palms are called “trees” is because of their vertical growing form and size, but in reality they have a different biological structure than that of hardwoods (such as Eucalyptus or Pine) and diverge from other trees in their root design, lack of certain woody tissues and growth habits. For example, did you know that Palms use nutrients from older fronds to develop new growth?



Some of the most common species of Palms in Southern California, especially in San Diego County, are Mexican and California Fan Palms (*Washingtonia robusta* and *filifera*), Queen Palm (*Syagrus romanzoffianum*) and the Canary Island and True Date Palms (*Phoenix canariensis* and *Phoenix dactylifera*).

Of all the common SoCal Palms, none seem more prevalent than the Mexican Fan Palm (MFP). MFP has one of the fastest growth rates of any Palm and can easily be planted in almost any soil. However, it's often considered a nuisance; gone unmaintained it can develop a long “skirt” of dead and highly-flammable fronds that can house all kinds of rodents, reptiles and arachnids. The aforementioned skirts also make pruning dangerous, as the old fronds become weak and are often “supported” by additional layers of dead foliage below.

Casualties are caused when unskilled workers attempt to prune these trees from the bottom up. During the course of work, the old layers of foliage can become dislodged and pour onto the climber below, trapping him under the foliage. Such an event could break someone's spinal cord, or even lead to asphyxiation. Needless to say, if you have Palms with heavy layers of dead fronds, seek professional care – this isn't the place to skimp. To ensure a healthy canopy, vigorous growth and a safe environment, you'll want to keep these trees annually maintained by removing only dead fronds and seedpods.



Message from the President

July and August are the perfect time of year to trim your palm trees. As their fruit is getting ready to drop, you can prevent any slip and fall hazards, along with quite a bit of mess, by trimming them now. If you need assistance with trimming your palm trees please allow us to provide you with a seasonal management plan.



n. (tree• tis) a formal and systematic exposition of the principles of a subject; more detailed than an essay.
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Alongside the MFP, the Queen Palm is arguably the second most common Palm we encounter in Southern California and is another that's difficult to maintain. Many of our customers constantly have problems with "foliar discoloration" and "spotting" (despite their best tree care efforts) and are stumped as to why their Queen Palms look bad. Truth is, foliar discoloration is often the result of environmental conditions that cause nutrient deficiencies, which watering, trimming or fertilizer applications cannot amend on their own.

Queen Palms in poorly aerated or drained soils, or those that have been planted too deep, often lack oxygen. Additionally, high soil alkalinity can cause Magnesium deficiencies, which in turn cause Potassium deficiencies. To make things even more complicated, if a Palm has a Potassium deficiency you don't want to trim the discolored fronds because it can lead the tree to further decline. While some nutrient deficiencies are very easily identified, others are deceiving. So if you're concerned about the status of your tree, always consult a qualified arborist before choosing a treatment approach.



One of the most difficult and expensive species of Palms to work with is the Phoenix species, host of the notorious Phoenix *Canariensis* and *Phoenix Dactylifera*, otherwise known as "date palms." The Date Palm has one of the largest and densest canopies in the urban landscape and has a variety of pathogens that threaten its vitality – the most violent of which is the Fusarium Wilt (*Fusarium Oxysporum*).

Fusarium is primarily a soil borne fungus, but can also be transmitted aerially. Many trees infected with Fusarium become so as a result of unsanitary pruning practices – chainsaws being used instead of sanitized handsaws. Regardless of what anyone may say, chainsaws cannot be fully sanitized for use in pruning of Phoenix *canariensis*. As a result, the time required to properly prune this species is more than doubled in order to complete appropriately.

Fusarium decays the vascular system of the tree, rendering it completely void of proper sugar, nutrient and water transportation. Unfortunately, there is no treatment or cure for Fusarium and any infected tree should be removed via crane so as not to infect any surrounding Palms. Again, before pruning or removing a tree suspected to have Fusarium, consult a qualified professional to correctly diagnose the pathogen and, if necessary, to perform the work.



Providing professional tree care backed by years of experience is paramount to all of us at Four Seasons Tree Care. Because of this, we continuously strive to educate and equip ourselves to meet and exceed your needs. Our entire crew is first aid and CPR Certified, and seven employees have earned their Certified Tree Worker/Climber Specialist designation (which includes training in Aerial Rescue). Our sales staff are Certified Arborists and Certified Treecare Safety Professionals, and our company as a whole has earned TCIA Accreditation, an industry endorsement created to uphold the most professional standards in the tree care industry.

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