

PALMS

Though we inevitably associate palms with tropical islands, desert oases and balmy climates, these plants have an extraordinary ability to adapt to almost any environment. As palms are so adaptable, they are excellent house plants, especially as they have such handsome foliage and elegant shapes. If you have only limited time to give to plants and their care, but still wish to have some greenery in your home, palms have much to recommend them, for they need very little attention. All the palms normally grown as house plants have similar requirements, so even looking after several different types is quite simple.

Most palms (Palmaceae), of course take the form of tall trees with leaves growing in a crown at the top, but numerous smaller species of varying appearance have been cultivated for home enjoyment. These are some of the most rewarding varieties:

ARECA PALM - This palm will reach a size of 6-7 feet. It will tolerate diffused sunlight or partial shade.

BAMBOO PALM - This palm will be a better choice for you if there is very little light. It has reed-like stems and is not quite as graceful a leaf structure as the Areca, however, its more upright growth habit makes it a good choice when space is at a premium. Very hardy variety.

FISH TAIL - This palm is somewhat different from the above palms. It will grow to about 6 or 7 feet. It requires a bright area -preferably diffused light. Also important is that these palms should never dry out.

PONYTAIL - Although it is not a true palm the ponytail is popular because of its unique bulbous trunk at the soil level (sometimes called elephant's foot palm). This palm likes average warmth and brightly-lit location, some sun is beneficial. Water thoroughly, then leave until moderately dry between waterings. Avoid watering too frequently.

KENTIA - The Cadillac of palms, this variety is slow-growing with perfectly sculpted, feathery fronds. It likes to be pot-bound. A bright location with indirect sun is a good location for the Kentia.

SAGO - A compact variety with stiff leathery leaves. It likes a bright location or without direct sun. Water thoroughly allowing soil to dry out between waterings. Reduce water in winter if plant is in lower light.

NEANTHEBELLE - or Parlour Palm. A very popular indoor palm, it grows to approximately 3ft. It is very tolerant of lower light areas. A very tough, compact variety.

WATERING: This is probably the most important factor in healthy plant maintenance. When to water! The cheapest and best water meter is your finger. At a point one or two inches in from the rim of the pot, push your finger into the soil slightly. This surface must feel dry to the touch if it is to be watered. If the soil feels moist and cool to the touch, check again in a few days. Palms, in pots 10" in diameter will generally require watering in 1 or 2 week intervals depending on individual room conditions such as temperature, light, humidity etc.

HOW TO WATER: Always enough that about 20% of the total volume of water used leaches out the drainage holes. This rinsing action is a very necessary tool in good soil maintenance. **NEVER** let the plant sit in this drained water. Poor watering (insufficient volume of water) is the main reason for browning of leaf tips.

FERTILIZING: Very sparingly during the months April through September at 1/3 manufacturer's recommend dosage and never during the months October through March. Plants are generally

growing very slowly at this time due to lack of light, so fertilizer (food) is not needed.

GROWTH: palms continually produce new "spikes" which open up into large, graceful, arching leaves. Periodic "showers" will help to keep the leaves clean and healthy. The occasional brown tip, or leaf, may be trimmed with scissors. Palms are easy to care for and will complement any room.

LIGHT AND TEMPERATURE: Palms generally like airy, bright conditions, but they cannot tolerate drafts, extreme dry heat, i.e. from a heat duct or sudden changes in intensity of light.

REPOTTING: Palms should only require repotting every second or third year. Move up one pot size only and use a mix containing one part potting soil, one part perlite and one part peat moss or, a mix of half potting soil and half Promix. Drench thoroughly after repotting. Remember to keep the soil level about 1"-2" below the rim of the pot to allow for the application of adequate water and the expansion of new roots which tend to push up the soil mix.