Palms Create a Strong Accent in Your Landscape

Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Two small native palms for north Florida are saw palmetto (Serenoa repens) and needle palm (Rapidophyllum hystrix).

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I remember my first trip to Florida as a young girl raised in Wisconsin, and the sheer delight I experienced as I began to see palm trees dotting the landscape. Palms are distinctive of our subtropical climate, and even here in north Florida there are a number of cold tolerant ones that can make beautiful additions to your landscape. Use them as accent plants flanking an entrance, focal points, or possibly even as foundation plants in the case of some of the smaller multi-trunked palms.

Remember the important principle of “Right plant, Right place” when considering which palm is the right one for your particular circumstance. Make sure to plant it in a location that gives it room to grow to maturity. The brief descriptions below will give you some idea of which palms might be right for you.

Smaller palms include the Broad-leaf Lady Palm (Rhapis excelsa), a clumping, low growing shrub which reaches 8-10 feet (best planted in an area with some cold protection); the native Dwarf Palmetto with its bluish color (Sabal minor) which reaches 3-6 feet; the European Fan Palm (Chamaerops humilis) growing 2-5 feet; the Needle Palm (Rapidophyllum hystrix) also fan shaped and growing 3-5 feet. This palm prefers fertile moist soils and some shade.

A personal favorite of mine is the Saw Palmetto (Serenoa repens) which grows 3-4 feet and makes a beautiful planting in mass. You will find Saw Palmettos in both green and silver, the silver type usually known as ‘Silver Saw’. These plants can only be purchased small, because they are difficult to transplant when larger, but patience with them yields great results. And finally, the Windmill Palm (Trachycarpus fortunei) which has a slender, erect, solitary trunk and fan shaped fronds. This palm makes a beautiful specimen plant and grows 5-10 feet tall.
If you are looking for a larger palm try our native state tree, the Cabbage Palm (*Sabal palmetto*) which has a heavy erect trunk and grows 30-60 feet tall, the California Washington Palm (*Washingtonia filifera*) 50-60 feet tall, the Hispaniolan Palmetto (*Sabal domingensis*) which grows 35-60 feet tall with large fan-shaped leaves, or the Pindo Palm (*Butia capitata*) with its feather-like fronds. This slow-growing palm is very popular in our area and reaches only 10-20 feet.

Thus far, none of the palms mentioned above, except the Windmill Palm, have been affected by the lethal yellowing disease that has devastated the coconut palms in south and central Florida. However, lethal yellowing can affect the date palms grown in our area, such as Canary Island Date Palm, (*Phoenix canariensis*).

You may ask, “Why didn’t she mention the Sago palm?” The answer is simple. Although beautiful and somewhat palm-like, the Sago is not a palm. It is a primitive Cycad like the native Coontie. Both are great plants for our area, but are not palms.

If this article incites you to invest in some palms for your landscape, first check out IFAS publication, EP019 which provides excellent information on the selection, planting and care of your palms, at [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep019](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep019)

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