United States Department of Agriculture
NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service
Plant Guide

FAN PALM

Washingtonia filifera

(L. Linden) H. Wendl.

plant symbol = WAFI

Contributed By: USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center

Brother Alfred Brousseau

Alternative Names
California fan palm

Use
Ethnobotanic: Palm oases were important habitation sites for the Cahuilla and other tribes. The fan palm provided abundant fruit that was relished by the Cahuilla. It was eaten fresh or dried in the sun and then stored in ollas for future consumption. The seeds and flour were pounded into a meal, mixed with other flours and water to a mush. A beverage was made by soaking the fruit in water. Additionally, the leaves were used for clothing, sandals, thatching, and basketry materials, the fruit stalks for fire drills, and leafstalks for household utensils. The Cahuilla, Diegueno, and Luiseno of southern California used the leaves for matting, stuffing and in rough ropemaking.

Wildlife: Hooded orioles nest in the tree canopies, constructing their nests of palm frond fragments. The paper wasp often builds its nest on the underside of a palm leaf and the western yellow bat roosts in fan palms. Woodpeckers make their nests in dead palm trees, and their cavities become home to a myriad of birds in later years including house finches, American kestrels, and owls.

Status
Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status, such as, state noxious status and wetland indicator values.

Description
General: Palm family (Arecaceae). This tree has a thick, robust trunk and achieves a height up to 20 m. The large tufts of leaves are fan-shaped, fibrous, and gray green, and their spined petioles are 1-2 m. The blades are 1-2 m and are divided nearly to the middle. The many white flowers are small and enclosed by a spathe. The black fruits are oblong or ovate.

Distribution
For current distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site**.**

Establishment
Adaptation: This plant is found below 1200 m in groves, alkaline spots of seeps, springs, and streams, on the west and north edge of the Colorado Desert, Turtle Mountains, the Sonoran Desert, southeastern Arizona, and northern Baja, California.

Propagation by seed: One can improve seed germination by collecting seeds from coyote manure. Apparently germination is very high from seeds which have passed through the animals' digestive systems. Plant the seeds in the spring in large pots, one-quarter inch apart in well-drained, friable soil such as a mixture of sand, loam, and peat moss or vermiculite and peat moss. Be patient, as the seeds take from four to fifteen weeks to germinate. At the first true leaf stage, plant the seedlings into separate one-gallon containers and hold until out-planting. Seedlings should be sheltered from winds and major temperature changes. When planting fan palm in a permanent location, plant seedlings during the fall, in areas exposed to full sunlight. Fall plantings must be watered during the following two summers if rainfall is low.

Management
The dead leaves that form a skirt should be removed periodically. Native Americans historically and prehistorically enhanced palm populations through firing palm stands and planting seeds. Palm stands were burned to control infestations of the palm-

boring beetle (*Dinapate wrightii*), to improve access to the palms and their fruit by clearing underbrush, and to increase the production and enhance the quality of fruit. Furthermore, these fires encouraged seed production, increasing the density of palms on favorable sites. Native Americans also acted as dispersal agents, carrying seeds of palms, which are small and easy to germinate, from one oasis to the next, extending the palm's range.

Cultivars, Improved and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

Please check the Vendor Database, expected to be on-line through the PLANTS Web site in 2001 by clicking on Plant Materials. Seeds and plants of selected *Washingtonia* cultivars are available from many nurseries. It is best to plant species from your local area, adapted to the specific site conditions where the plants are to be grown.

References

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Prepared By

M. Kat Anderson
USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center

Wayne Roderick
Former Director of the East Bay Regional Parks Botanic Garden, Berkeley, California

Species Coordinator

M. Kat Anderson
USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center
c/o Environmental Horticulture Department, University of California, Davis, California

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