

# Date Palms

## Info Sheet

### *Phoenix spp.*

There are about a dozen species of date palms belonging to the genus *Phoenix*. They are native to south Asia, the Middle East and Africa, but are commonly found wherever palms are grown. The genus name, *Phoenix*, is the Greek word for palm. The Greeks associated palms with the Phoenicians who carried edible date palms to plant on their travels around the Mediterranean Sea.

The size of date palms ranges from dwarves like the Pygmy Date (10 ft.) to the massive Canary Island Date, the largest single trunk palm commonly seen in Florida. Date Palms can be divided into two general categories; dry climate species and tropical species. Three of each kind are more or less common in Florida landscapes.

First are the dry climate types: **Indian Date** (*Phoenix sylvestris*), has bluish foliage and is large to moderate in size. It is the most desirable of the large dry climate types and is becoming very popular. **True Date** or Edible Date (*Phoenix sylvestris*) is an important food crop in many parts of the world. These trees are often imported to Florida as large mature specimens from California date groves, but they are not recommended since they are poorly suited to our climate and suffer here from a number of diseases. They will not produce fruit in Florida. **Pineapple Palm** or **Canary Island Date** (*Phoenix canariensis*) is a longtime favorite palm in Florida, but it gets too large for most home landscapes and is very susceptible to several diseases and insects which can kill it.

Of the tropical types, **Pygmy Date** (*Phoenix roebelenii*) is one of the most common palms cultivated in Florida. It is trouble-free for the most part, but cannot stand hard freezes. **Senegal Date**, (*Phoenix reclinata*) forms a large clump with several trunks. It is too large for most home landscapes, but makes a very impressive specimen given enough space. **Cliff Date** (*Phoenix rupicola*), the least common date palm here, is native to India and resembles a larger version of the Pygmy Date. Some consider it the most beautiful of all the dates, but it is also more difficult to grow.

### Planting

Dry climate dates require full sun; tropical species can be planted in sun or partial shade. Set plants in the ground at soil level. Use improved soil to backfill around them and apply a mulch to the

surface of the soil. Water 3 times per week for 2 weeks and once per week after that until the palms are well established.

### Fertilizing

Fertilize every other month with **Harrell's 11-4-11**. Dry climate dates are often deficient in magnesium sulfate, but do not apply magnesium sulfate or epsom salts separately unless we advise it. The correct amount of magnesium is contained in the **Harrell's**.

### Plant Problems

Dry climate dates are more disease and insect prone than tropical species. They are susceptible to:

**Ganoderma Butt Rot:** A disease that kills the trunk at the base, thus killing the tree over a period of years. There is no cure. Avoid damaging the trunk in any way.

**Fusarium Wilt:** Spreads from one palm to another most often by pruning tools. Once infected, trees always die. One half of the tree dies first, then the rest. There is no cure. Sterilize tools with a bleach solution between each tree.

**Palm Weevils:** Large weevils lay eggs in the crown of the palm which then hatch into huge grubs that eat the heart of the palm. Although these insects can be controlled with pesticides, they are usually noticed too late and the tree dies. Canary Island Date is very susceptible to this insect.

**Magnesium Deficiency:** The leaflets of lower leaves have yellow tips, making the lower half of the tree look yellow. Can be cured over time by fertilizing with **Harrell's 11-4-11**. We may also advise adding some magnesium sulfate.

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