

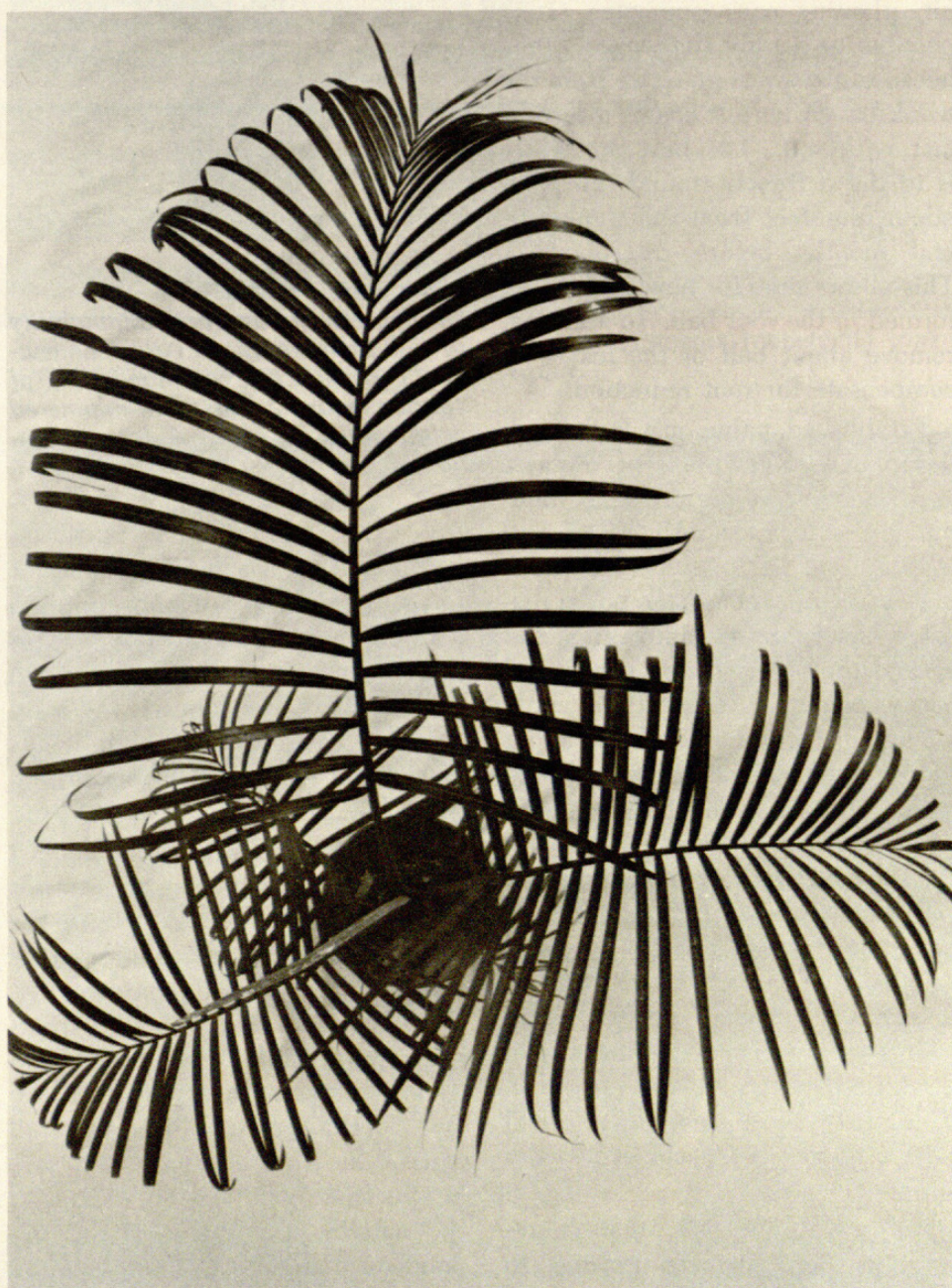
By Julia Martens



PALM PANORAMA

PALMS OF MANY DIFFERENT forms and sizes crowd the large palm booth during the Baldwin Bonanza every May at the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum. By the time the plant sale closes, local gardeners will have purchased most of them because tidy growth habit and adaptability to Southern California gardens make palms superior ornamental plants here. Although books on palm culture list dozens of species suitable for subtropical landscaping, many of the unusual members of the 4,000 strong *Palmae* family are often hard to find in local nurseries.

Given the mild climate of Southern California, a number of attractive palms from dwarf clumps to 200-foot-tall single stemmed trees may be grown here with relative ease. The skyline of Los Angeles is replete with the tall silhouettes of Mexican fan palms that lend character to the city's landscape. The prime limiting factor in Southern California is not the occasional frost but instead the successive cold nights that normally occur during the winter months. Since even a home garden can have areas of differing temperatures, it pays to determine the optimum location before planting a palm. A partially shaded south or southeast corner will warm up fairly quickly each morning without burning the palm leaves. Areas with light, well-drain-



The featherlike fronds of Neodypsis decaryi spiral out from a triangular trunk. (Photos by Jim Johnson)

ed soil will be a few degrees warmer, as will locations next to water or on a hill slope.

Once the location has been established the soil should be prepared before planting the palm in spring or early summer. As a group, palms are unusually responsive to good amounts of fertilizers, organic amendments, and water. After digging as large a hole as patience allows, half fill it with compost, well-rotted manure or other organic material and incorporate it into the topsoil. After the earth has settled a bit, planting can commence. It is possible to readily shift large palms because new roots generate from the trunk base where it comes into contact with soil. The best procedure is to dig a trench around the palm about four feet from the trunk several months before transplanting. This allows time for new roots to be formed in the root ball. In addition, remove about half of the leaves to compensate for root reduction.

Established palms are long-lived, durable, relatively free of diseases and insects, and require only minimum maintenance. All palms will benefit from having a 6-inch mulch of peat, compost or decomposed manure incorporated into the soil around the base, once in spring and again in summer. In addition, apply organic or inorganic fertilizers about twice a year. Large, established palms will take from 10 to 15 pounds per treatment, while small palms should be given one to five pounds of balanced fertilizer. As a general rule, remove dead, yellow or damaged foliage as soon as it's noticed. If desired, selective pruning of a palm's leaf bases may be done to create attractive trunk patterns. Rinsing by hose periodically will help keep down insects like spider mites.

Palms are monocots, that is, related to bamboos and grasses, so they have a quite different trunk structure from the typical forest



Deep green foliage and adaptability to low light situations earn Chamaedorea elegans the common name of "parlor palm." This well-mannered palm grows to about 4 feet at maturity.

tree. The trunks don't produce annual growth rings; the trunk interior is relatively soft but shot through with very hard siliceous fibers. This type of construction gives support to the tall trunk and supplies the resilience to easily endure high winds that would topple other, more rigid, trees.

Graceful palms silhouetted against the sky epitomize the tropics for most temperate dwellers because the majority of palm species grow naturally only in warm climates. In fact, some are of major economic importance, particularly the coconut and African oil palms, both of which provide vegetable fat for processed foods. In North Africa the staple food is fruit from the date palm, and the natives of tropical islands depend on palms for shelter, building materials, thatch, clothing, fuel, starch, sugar, oil and wine. Some

cultures are entirely based on the palm and its products.

Palms are broadly divided into two types—those with fan-like leaves and those with feather-like leaves. Within these groups a tremendous variety of color, fruit and size can be found. Therefore palms can be used for a whole range of ornamental effects. Placed adjacent to swimming pools they give a tropical atmosphere, while larger palms make striking corridors as avenue plantings. Many make excellent houseplants when young and can be relocated outside when they mature.

The fishtail palms of the genus *Caryota* make beautiful specimen plants in frost-free areas or potted plants for patios and indoors. *Caryotas* are the only palms with bipinnate leaves which resemble maiden-hair fern foliage on a larger scale. At Baldwin Bonanza XII the eight following *Chamaedorea* species will be for sale: *cataractarum*, *radicalis*, *oblongata*, *schippii* x *erumpens*, *metallica*, *seifrizii*, *costaricana* and *microspadix*. They all naturally grow in deep shade, making them excellent minimum-care house plants. As *chamaedoreas* slowly increase in size they may be shifted to porch or patio situations, and ultimately planted outdoors in a shaded space. The feather-like leaves form a small crown above single or clustered bamboo-like stems.

A very well-known palm grown indoors in California is the coconut. It requires warm temperatures and ample water and light to thrive. Young coconuts make fine potted plants for about 10 years before they become too large for indoor use. More commonly seen is the kentia or sentry palm (*Howea forsteriana*), a single stem tree with long, drooping, feather-like leaves.

An unusual trunk shape is exhibited by the bottle palm (*Hyophorbe lagenicaulis*); the trunk base thickens towards the middle, and

then narrows like a bottleneck to the crownshaft. It's best used as a specimen tree. A good outdoor palm for a confined space is the small, dainty pygmy date palm (*Phoenix roebelenii*). Rarely more than six feet tall, this slim tree has been called the aristocrat of date palms; the thin leaflets give a soft, fragile effect. *Neodypsis decaryi*, another feather-like palm, is an unusual specimen from Madagascar. The leaf bases spiral up the trunk in three vertical rows, giving it a very distinctive triangular shape.

An example of fan-type palms is the genus *Rhapis*, or lady palm, small, often beautifully variegated plants, from southern China. The Japanese developed many named cultivars of *Rhapis excelsa* over the centuries that they have grown the exquisite dwarf palms. Two solid green cultivars 'Daruma' and 'Kadaruma' and the more rare variegated 'Zuikon-Nishiki', will be available in two sizes during the Bonanza. Typically, *Rhapis* palms are kept moist, in high humidity, and appear best when grown in shade. As the trunk elongates, one can either air-layer the top to maintain a compact indoor *Rhapis*, or transfer it to the yard as an outdoor palm. Currently *Rhapis* are increasing in popularity among collectors, and are becoming available commercially.

Rhapis varieties and the other palms previously described can be purchased during the Baldwin Bonanza preview party on the evening of April 30. California Arboretum Foundation members and their guests will have the opportunity to choose among the unusual palms, some of which are available in only limited numbers, before the plant sale opens to the general public May 1 and 2.

Julia Martens received her M.S. in ornamental horticulture from Ohio State University.



Finely divided foliage of the pygmy date palm (*Phoenix roebelenii*) tops a slender trunk that will grow to about 6 feet tall.



The dwarf lady palm (*Rhapis excelsa*) 'Zuikon-Nishiki' is one of the rare palms for sale at Baldwin Bonanza XII.



Eight species of chamaedorea palms will be for sale at Baldwin Bonanza XII.

LOS ANGELES STATE AND COUNTY ARBORETUM, Arcadia

MARCH 6, 7 — 12:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Girl Scout Flower Show
Sierra Madres Girl Scout Council**

MARCH 20, 21—Sat. 12:30 to 4:30 p.m.
Sunday, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Spring Flower Show
Monrovia Garden Club and the
Arcadia Garden Club**

MARCH 27 — 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Environmental Education Fair.
Hosted by the L.A. State &
County Arboretum

APRIL 3, 4 — Saturday 1 to 4:30 p.m.
Sunday 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Aril Show
Aril Society International**

APRIL 10, 11 — 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Bonsai Show
Mame Society of So. Calif.**

APRIL 17, 18 — Saturday 1 to 4:30 p.m.
Sunday 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Lily Show
Southern California Hemerocallis and
Amaryllis Society**

APRIL 24, 25 — Saturday 1 to 4:30 p.m.
Sunday 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Rose Show
Pacific Rose Society**

MAY 1, 2 — 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Baldwin Bonanza, a plant sale*

MAY 16 — 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Epiphyllum Show
Epiphyllum Society**

MAY 22, 23 — 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Satsuki Show
Valley Satsuki Society**

CALENDAR

MARCH, APRIL, MAY, 1982

MAY 29, 30 — 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Bonsai Show
Santa Anita Bonsai Society**

*Sponsored by California Arboretum
Foundation

**Cosponsored by California
Arboretum Foundation

DESCANSO GARDENS, La Canada

MARCH 20, 21 — Sat. noon to 4:30 p.m.
Sunday 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Daffodil Show
Southern California Daffodil Society**

APRIL 3 thru 18 — 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Spring Flower Show*

MAY 1 thru 9 — 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Bonsai Show and Sale
Descanso Gardens Bonsai Society**

*Sponsored by Descanso Gardens Club
**Cosponsored by Descanso Gardens
Club

SOUTH COAST BOTANIC GARDEN, Palos Verdes Peninsula

MARCH 7 — noon to 4:30 p.m.
African violet show and demonstra-
tion*

Ralph Breden

MARCH 14 — 2 p.m.
Display of gemstones and fossils of

Palos Verdes Peninsula
Beach Cities Gem, Mineral, &
Fossil Society

MARCH 21 — 2 p.m.
Biblical herbs and their uses
South Bay Herb Society**

MARCH 28 — 2 p.m.
Hawaiian plants for your garden
Southern California Horticultural
Institute

APRIL 4 — 2 p.m.
Flower arranging demonstration*
Claude Smith, John Turman,
Jason Terry, and Jim White

APRIL 18 — 2 p.m.
Spring Concert*
Richard Schwalbe, Palos Verdes
Symphonic Band

APRIL 25 — 2 p.m.
Talk on bromeliads
Leslie Walker
National Bromeliad Society**

MAY 1, 2 — Saturday 1 to 4:30 p.m.
Sunday 9:30 to 4:30 p.m.
Bromeliad Show
South Bay Bromeliad Association**

MAY 15, 16 — 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Fiesta de Flores, a plant sale*

MAY 22, 23 — Sat. 12:30 to 4:30 p.m.
Sunday 9:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Rose Show
South Coast Rose Society**

MAY 30 — 2 p.m.
Plants for coastal gardens*
Virginia Fleener

*Sponsored by South Coast Botanic
Garden Foundation
**Cosponsored by South Coast Botanic
Garden Foundation



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