



Florida Cooperative Extension Service

## The Carpentaria Palm: A Fast-Growing Palm for South Florida<sup>1</sup>

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The carpentaria palm (*Carpentaria acuminata*) is a medium-sized palm related to the genus *Veitchia*. It is native to Australia and its solitary trunk reaches a maximum diameter of 10 inches and a maximum height of 30 to 40 feet (Fig. 1). It is a fast-growing palm, but growth is determined largely by the care that the palm receives. Poor fertilization and a lack of water will limit the maximum size considerably. This characteristic allows fast production in a commercial nursery, yet can prevent the palm from outgrowing a homeowner's landscape.

Widely spaced leafscars give the appearance of bamboo to the smooth trunk, which is topped by a green crownshaft formed by the leaf bases. The pinnate leaves (feather-shaped) fall off cleanly as they die.

Bright red ornamental fruit are produced profusely when the palm matures after five to six years. A mature palm is capable of producing several thousand three-quarter inch seeds that are suitable for propagation. Seeds that drop under the palm are quickly consumed by birds and insects; few germinate if left in place.

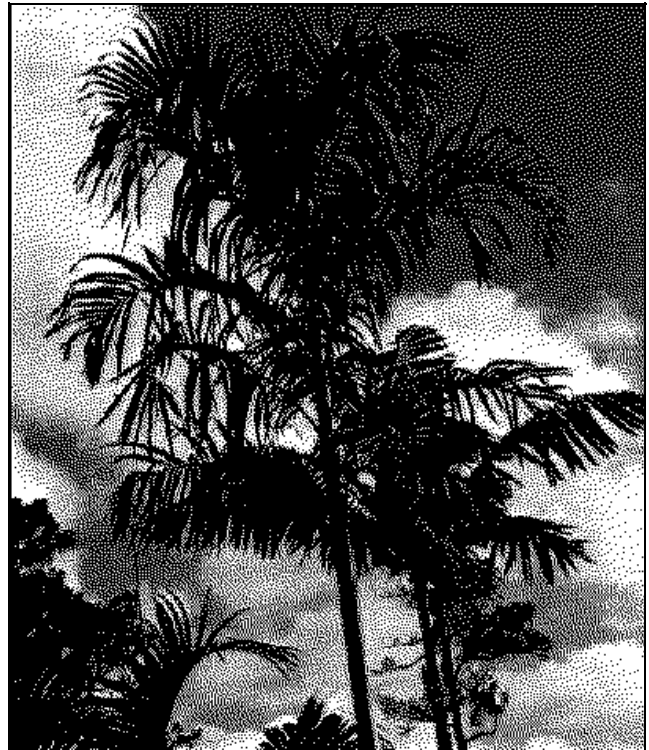


Figure 1. Four-year-old carpentaria palm in south Florida landscape.

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## PROPAGATION

Carpentaria palms are grown from seed, and are widely available in south Florida. Contact your Extension Office for the location of fruiting palms that may be near you from which seed can be collected.

Only fresh seeds should be used. Remove the fleshy covering surrounding the seed either mechanically or by soaking in water for several days. The fruit wall contains an irritant (calcium oxylate crystals) and should not be handled extensively or cleaned with bare hands. Seeds should be planted in shallow containers filled with a mixture of 50 percent peat moss and 50 percent perlite. Plant the seeds so that they are barely covered. If damping-off or other fungus diseases are a problem, drench the container with a seed protectant fungicide.

Germination occurs within two to three months if the seeds are kept warm (80 to 85°F). At cooler temperatures, germination may be delayed for as long as one year. Seedling containers should be kept evenly moist.

Transplant the seedling carpentaria palms into four- or six-inch containers when they are five- to six-inches tall. Use a standard potting mix that allows good drainage. Begin a fertilization program at once, using slow release fertilizers recommended for foliage production. Add micro-elements to the soil mix. Young plants grow best when grown under 30 to 50 percent shade. As the palm roots begin to fill the soil ball, move them to larger pots or transplant to a field nursery. Older containerized plants can be grown in full sun.

## TRANSPLANTING

Field-grown carpentaria palms transplant readily with no prior root pruning. Standard practices of tying the leaves with twine to support the tender bud and reduce transpiration should be used. Under no circumstance should the root ball be allowed to dry out. Containerized palms also transplant readily.

The planting site requires no advance preparation. Current planting recommendations discourage mixing soil amendments with the backfill. Rather, it is important to apply a thick layer of organic mulch around the base of the newly planted palm. Mulch improves the soil, and reduces weed competition and water consumption.

## CARE AFTER PLANTING

Standard fertilization, using granular fertilizer with a 3-1-3-1 ratio of nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and magnesium, complete with all micro-elements, provides all the nutrients the carpentaria palm requires. Use one to three pounds per application, increasing gradually to 3 to 10 pounds, depending on the size of the palm. Reapply every three to four months. A fertilizer program such as that recommended for coconut palms ("A Fertilization Program for the Coconut Palm," OH-55) works very well for carpentaria palms.

## PESTS AND DISEASES

Fortunately, very few pests and diseases have been observed on the carpentaria palm. No cases of lethal yellowing have been observed even in areas where the palm was surrounded by other types of palms dying from this disease. However, complete resistance to lethal yellowing cannot be determined until methods of artificially transmitting the disease under controlled conditions are developed.

Common insect pests such as palm aphid, scale, and caterpillars are readily controlled with available insecticides. Consult your Cooperative Extension Service office for current recommendations. Thrips damage has been seen on carpentaria palms. These insects can also be easily controlled with insecticides.

The rapid growth of carpentaria palms produces a soft trunk that requires several months to become woody. Severe damage can occur to the trunks if they are hit with lawnmowers or cord-type weeders. The damaged trunks invite fungus diseases that can weaken or destroy the palm. Copper-based fungicides control leafspot fungus that can occur after cold weather.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Little information is available about resistance of the carpentaria palms to strong winds. Salt tolerance is moderate. Carpentaria palms have survived cold temperatures of 24°F, but were severely damaged. They appear to be slightly less cold-hardy than coconut palms.