

The Palms of the Urban Forest

What are palms?

Palms are monocots or grass-like plants but they can grow tall and have woody stems like trees. While not truly trees, they perform many of the same functions as trees, such as providing cover, controlling air pollution and controlling carbon storage and sequestration.

How many palms are in Tampa?

In 2007, the total number of palms in Tampa was estimated to be 584,658. Palm species represent 7% of the trees of Tampa's urban forest.

What is the most common palm?

Cabbage palm is the most abundant palm in Tampa, accounting for six percent of the urban forest. It is also the state tree of Florida and is the only native palm of large stature found in the city. Cabbage palm is one of the top ten dominant species found in the urban forest and accounts for 75% of all palms in Tampa (Figure 1). Cabbage palms are tolerant of both drought and high water tables, and therefore can exist across a broad spectrum of growing conditions. Within the urban environment it is found in parks and other natural areas. Due to the cabbage palm's high level of wind resistance it makes an ideal palm for planting near buildings and in public areas.

Are there other Florida native species of palms in the urban forest?

Saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) is the second most common of all palms in the city and is native to Florida. In less urbanized forested areas, saw palmetto is often seen as the thick palm ground cover beneath open pine woodlands. Like the cabbage palm, saw palmetto is naturally drought and insect resistant.

In addition to these native palms, many non-native palms are used to provide a distinct structural element to the city's landscape and palm species have been consistently used on residential sites and public rights-of-way to accent the city's sub-tropical climate.

Are there significant diseases affecting palms in Tampa?

Yes! One such disease is *Fusarium oxysporum*, a fatal fungal disease. This disease affects queen palm (*Syagrus romanzoffiana*), the third most common palm in the city (5.8%), and Mexican fan palm (*Washingtonia robusta*), another of the more common (1.7%), large stature palms. Researchers now suggest that the pathogen is likely being spread by wind and that palms should not be replanted onto a site where one with this disease was removed before. Another disease affecting palms in Tampa is the *Texas Phoenix palm decline*, a fatal bacterial disease. This disease affects Canary Island date palm (*Phoenix canariensis*), edible date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*), wild date palm (*Phoenix sylvestris*) and cabbage palm, the most abundant palm in Tampa.

Figure 1: Relative number of the top five palm species based on the number of stems.

