Pruning Palms

Pruning palms should aim to remove dead frond for health and aesthetic reasons. Over-pruning a palm does not make it grow faster. The fronds of a palm are its food source, and removing too many stops it from receiving the necessary nutrients.

There are two types of palms: self- cleaning and “booted” or non- self- cleaning palms.

- Self- cleaning palms are the ones whose fronds fall off after they die. Examples include Foxtail Palms, Veitchia Palms, Royal Palms, and Coconut Palms. Self- cleaning palms hold dead fronds for only a few days at most, and then allow them to drop, leaving a clean, smooth trunk.

- Booted palms hold their dead fronds indefinitely. Examples include the Cabbage Palm, Washingtonia Palm, and Canary Island Date Palm. Some people like the dead fronds that can create a natural, carefree look. Others prefer to remove them.

Palm experts recommend that you remove only dead fronds from all palms. If you choose to remove the dead fronds from booted palms, wait until they are completely dead, because cutting into living tissue open the tree up to pests and disease infestation and removes a nutrient source. Proper palm pruning dictates that only fronds that grow downward, below the horizontal, are removed (picture the 8:00 and 4:00 positions on a clock). This helps protect the health of the tree!

Flowers and fruits can be removed as well, which is a way to reduce fruit drop. Make clean cuts and sanitize tools between palms. Any sprouts coming from the base of the trunk or seedlings close by should be removes as well as they compete with the palm for water and nutrients.

In addition to making sure that your palms are properly pruned, you will want to fertilize them appropriately. Fertilizers are sold by a ratio of the three elements Nitrogen (N), Phosphorus (P), and Potassium (K). The recommended ratio for palms is 2N: 1P: 3K. For example, an 8-4-12 formula would be appropriate. Choose fertilizers that supply elements in a timed-release form (not water-soluble). Make sure that your palm fertilizer also contains Magnesium, Manganese, Boron, and Iron. These four elements are not always available in other fertilizers, but are crucial to the health of palms. Use between one and one and a half pounds of fertilizer per inch of diameter of a palm. Fertilizer should be applied three to four times per year and broadcast under the entire canopy. Avoid spreading the fertilizer densely around the trunk, as this supplies too much near the trunk and not enough to the outer roots. Landscape or turf fertilizers, especially those with water- soluble Potassium, should not be used within 30 feet of your palm tree.
Over-pruned!

Just right!

If you have questions or need more information, contact the Department of Design, Landscape and Construction Management at 954-585-2360

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