

Yard and Garden 04-23-2011 -- Ted Griess/ Extension Horticulture Assistant

Tomorrow is Easter. For Christians, Easter Sunday exemplifies the true meaning of Christianity. Although closely related, today's column is not entirely about Easter, but rather it focuses more on last Sunday, Palm Sunday, and particularly about those plants we refer to as palms. The Biblical story tells us when Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem for the last time before his crucifixion, the crowds waved and placed branches of palm trees on the roadway carpeting his path. I have often contemplated the significance of why they chose palms. A little later, I will share more with you about that; but, for now, allow me to explain my current interest in palm trees.

In March, during Rita's spring break, we had the opportunity to visit my brother Ruben and his wife Lisa. A little over a year ago, they moved from what I always refer to as the Great White North, namely Minnesota, to South Texas. On the day we departed from Omaha, morning temperatures were in the low to mid-thirties, and snowflakes fluttered about. Later that day, when our plane touched down in Harlingen, Texas, I immediately discovered there was no need for winter coats. Temperatures were in the high 70's. I also noticed palm trees. They were everywhere. It was obvious; we were no longer in frigid Nebraska, and we certainly were nowhere near the Great White North.

Ruben and Lisa's home is located in Laguna Vista, Texas, on the South Padre Island Golf Course some thirty miles southeast of Harlingen. As my brother drove us to their home, I noticed a number of citrus orchards along the way and a few other unknown deciduous trees. What really caught my attention were the many palm trees. I was out of my comfort zone. I knew nothing about this vegetation, but I was determined to learn more.

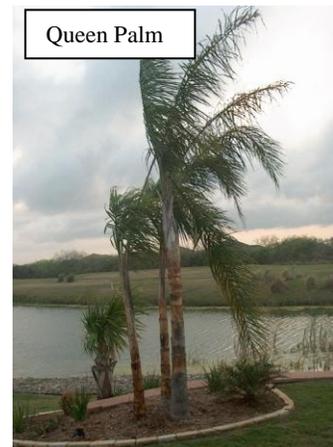


Washingtonian Palm

Upon arriving at their beautiful home, being the gardener that I am, I was instantly fascinated with the landscape. It consisted of a wide array of palm trees and other tropical vegetation. Throughout that week, I discovered a number of things involving palms. Some of the palms growing in their yard were indigenous, while many came from other parts of the world. Growing in the landscape were Mexican Washingtonian Palms,

Queen Palms, Sago Palms, Royal Cuban Palms, Texas Sabal Palms, Foxtail Palms, and Phoenix Date Palms.

Interestingly, a few weeks prior to our arrival, that area of South Texas experienced an out-of-the-norm, prolonged freeze that visibly harmed and possibly killed some of the more marginal palms



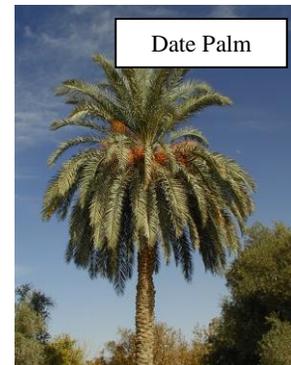
Queen Palm

including the Foxtail Palms and the Royal Cuban Palms. Very much like a late freeze to our area, people must wait to see if the palms survive.



Since our visit to Texas, I've researched palms. I discovered thousands of species exist. They grow all over the world. Most are considered tropical; whereas, some are called cold hardy and can be planted outdoors. A single freeze may injure or kill many non-hardy palms, while cold hardy palms are capable of withstanding temperatures near zero for short periods without incurring damage. Windmill and Mediterranean palms are two examples of cold hardy species. No palm is capable of surviving Nebraska's freezing winters.

Here, they are grown either as houseplants or in containers outdoors during the summer and taken indoors for the winter.



Now, back to Palm Sunday. In the area of Jerusalem, many species of palm trees commonly grow. Based on what I now know about palm trees, my guess is that Mediterranean or Date Palms were the species likely used to line the pathway into Jerusalem. In ancient times the laying of palm branches on the roadway was a common Middle Eastern practice to welcome a king or hero home after a victory.

Certainly, according to the Christian faith, Jesus was the heroic king who proclaimed victory over death. With that, I wish each of you a Happy Easter.



Sunrise on South Padre Island Golf Course