

## ***Sabal palmetto*: Cabbage Palm<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Introduction**

Capable of reaching 90 feet or more in the woods (when shaded or protected by surrounding trees) but usually seen at 40 to 50 feet in height, this amazingly sturdy native palm has a rough, fibrous trunk that is quite variable in shape, from straight and erect, to curved or leaning. Cabbage Palm is topped with a very dense, 10 to 15-foot-diameter, round crown of deeply cut, curved, palmate leaves. This is South Carolina's and Florida's state tree, and is well-suited to use as a street planting, framing tree, specimen, or clustered in informal groupings of varying size. Cabbage Palm is ideal for seaside locations. The four to five-foot-long, creamy white, showy flower stalks in the summer are followed by small, shiny, green to black fruits which are relished by squirrels, raccoons, and other wildlife.

### **General Information**

**Scientific name:** *Sabal palmetto*

**Pronunciation:** SAY-bull pahl-MET-oh

**Common name(s):** Cabbage Palm, Cabbage Palmetto

**Family:** *Arecaceae*

**USDA hardiness zones:** 8B through 11 (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** native to North America

**Invasive potential:** little invasive potential

**Uses:** reclamation; street without sidewalk; specimen; parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; urban tolerant; highway median

**Availability:** not native to North America

### **Description**

**Height:** 40 to 50 feet

**Spread:** 10 to 15 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical

**Crown shape:** palm, upright/erect

**Crown density:** open

1. This document is ENH-733, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date November 1993. Revised December 2006. Visit the EDIS Web Site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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Figure 1. Mature *Sabal palmetto*: Cabbage Palm

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** coarse

### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** spiral (Fig. 3)

**Leaf type:** costapalmate

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** star-shaped, orbiculate

**Leaf venation:** palmate

**Leaf type and persistence:** broadleaf evergreen, evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** more than 36 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

### Flower

**Flower color:** white/cream/gray

**Flower characteristics:** showy

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** round

**Fruit length:** less than .5 inch

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard, fleshy

**Fruit color:** black

**Fruit characteristics:** attracts squirrels/mammals; not showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** branches don't droop; not showy; typically one trunk; thorns

**Pruning requirement:** little required

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** not applicable

**Current year twig thickness:**

**Wood specific gravity:** unknown

### Culture

**Light requirement:** full sun, partial sun or partial shade

**Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; extended flooding; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** high

### Other

**Roots:** not a problem



**Figure 2.** Range

**Winter interest:** no

**Outstanding tree:** no

**Ozone sensitivity:** unknown

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** resistant

**Pest resistance:** resistant to pests/diseases

## Use and Management

Cabbage Palm is about as hurricane-proof as a tree can be. They stand after many hurricanes have blown over the oaks and snapped the pines in two. They adapt well to small cutouts in the sidewalk, and can even create shade if planted on 6 to 10 foot centers. Clean the trunk of leaf bases to eliminate a habitat for roaches.

Cabbage Palm is exceptionally easy to transplant and will thrive in full sun or partial shade. It will adapt to slightly brackish water as well as dry, sandy locations and requires no special care once

established. But it needs to be watered regularly until established since all cut roots die back to the trunk after transplanting. New roots are regenerated from the base of the trunk and require warm soil temperatures and plenty of water to survive. There is evidence showing that removing all the fronds increases transplant survival. Tie the top-most fronds together if only lower fronds are removed so that the bud is protected during transport. Cabbage Palm is drought-tolerant, but not until it is well-established in the landscape after transplanting. New transplants (particularly those receiving too little water) are particularly susceptible to the palm weevil which kills the palm. Although one of the hardier palms, 11-degrees F. killed about twenty-five percent of the Cabbage Palms in 1983 in Baton Rouge.

Cabbage Palms are generally collected from existing stands and are not grown in nurseries. Seeds germinate readily in the landscape, generating many seedlings. Removing the seedlings from beneath the canopy can be a nuisance.

*Sabal peregriana* , planted in Key West, grows to about 25 feet high. *Sabal minor* , a native Dwarf Palmetto, creates an exotic, usually stemless shrub, four feet high and wide. Older Dwarf Palmettos develop trunks to six feet tall. *Sabal mexicana* grows in Texas and looks similar to *Sabal Palmetto* .

### **Pests**

Giant palm weevil, cabbage palm caterpillar, and a large number of scales infest Cabbage Palm. The giant palm weevil attacks recently transplanted palms and can kill them.

### **Diseases**

Ganoderma butt rot is perhaps the most serious disease of Cabbage Palms. It kills palms which it infects. The disease enters the trunk primarily through injuries on the lower trunk and roots. Avoid irrigating the trunk. There is no control for butt rot, only prevention. Remove infected palms as soon as possible.