



# NZPalms.co.nz

*Beautiful palms, cycads and subtropical plants from New Zealand's Far North*

## **Planting palms**

The majority of our palm trees are intended to be planted outdoors. Whilst planting and caring for a palm tree is a relatively easy affair there are a few things to be aware of.

### **Where to plant**

Give thought to the eventual size of the palm you are buying; beware of planting large palms too close to buildings or under power lines. Consider also the requirements each palm has. Which direction is the prevailing wind? Is the location wet or dry? Is it shaded or in full sun?

### **When to plant**

There's not really a wrong time to plant in Auckland and Northland's mild and wet climate. However a few considerations:

- If planting in late spring or summer then do be mindful of drought and water regularly if required.
- Autumn is an excellent time to plant since rainfall tends to be higher than in summer and the temperatures are a little cooler.
- With the exception of very tender palms there is nothing at all wrong with planting in winter. Provided the ground's not too boggy your palm will have a good chance to acclimatise before the weather warms up.
- Early spring is also an excellent time to plant. If the palm is a delicate species the leaves may look slightly damaged as it will have been growing in a pot outside throughout the winter. By late summer however you should have an attractive palm.

### **Soil considerations, drainage and irrigation**

The type of soil you have should be taken into account when planting. Clay-based soils have a tendency to become waterlogged in winter whilst in summer they can become hard and prone to cracking. Meanwhile sandy soils tend to have excellent drainage but can dry out quickly. In both cases soil conditioners and/or improved drainage may be worth considering.

The simplest approach to watering is to use a basic and inexpensive garden irrigation system. Remember that it's better to provide infrequent, heavy watering than a light daily watering. This will avoid the palms only producing shallow roots and being dependent upon near-constant watering. The amount of water required will be a function of the species you select with desert palms needing less watering than rainforest palms.

### **Preparing the hole**

Dig the hole about six inches wider than the pot all around (that is, one foot wider than the pot). Similarly, dig the hole about six inches deeper than the pot. Break up the soil you removed and, if you wish, add any soil conditioners. Re-fill the bottom of the hole to the required depth. Pack the soil down and water well.

You may prefer to raise the palm slightly (perhaps one-third of the pot height) or plant the palm so that the soil height is flush with the surrounding ground. If raising the palm be sure to mound sufficient soil around the palm so that it is sturdy and the roots are not exposed. If planting flush with the ground be sure not to over-plant and bury the trunk (this can prove fatal if too much of the trunk is covered).

### **Removing the palm from the bag or pot**

Here you need to be careful not to disturb the roots of the palm. It may be that the easiest way to remove a large palm is to cut the bag or pot. Do this vertically in three places (120° apart) and then cut around the base. For the base itself you may need to cut around the drainage holes if roots have formed tangled knots.

### **Filling in the remainder of the hole**

Tip in the soil around all sides of the hole. Use a mallet to pack it in so that it fills about half the depth of the hole. Water in well ensuring that the root ball is well watered. Next continue to fill in the remainder of the soil. Repeat the watering-in with a slowly dripping hose for around twenty minutes. Mulch around the palm to retain moisture.

### **After planting**

Continue to water regularly (every few days depending upon weather conditions) for a couple of weeks then reduce to once or twice a week (again, depending upon the weather). There is no need to fertilise the palm for the first two months. Once established the attractive leaves on the palm are unlikely to be the ones it was planted with. These will usually be cannibalised by the palm to provide the nutrition needed to produce new leaves.



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## Palm maintenance

### Watering

As a general rule make sure that palm trees receive sufficient watering in the growing months (September to May) but also have good drainage. When watering it's better to provide a good soaking periodically (perhaps twice a week in dry spells) than a light sprinkling daily. This helps the plant to develop good, deep roots.

While most palm species that grow in New Zealand will appreciate good access to water during warm weather some species are particularly grateful and will reward you with fast and lush growth. These include:

- Bangalow palm (*Archontophoenix cunninghamiana*)
- King palm (*Archontophoenix alexandrae*)
- Majesty palm (*Ravenea rivularis*)
- Cascade palm (*Chamaedorea cataractarum*)
- Himalayan Fishtail palm (*Caryota maxima*)
- Juçara palm (*Euterpe edulis*)
- *Musa* and *Ensete* bananas

### Weeding

For good growth and a tidy appearance it's best to keep weeds at least two to three feet from the trunk of a palm. Once mature it's generally safe to use a herbicide such as Roundup (although please read the supplier's instructions and ensure that you spray on a calm day avoiding spray-drift on the leaves of the palm tree). For younger palms it's best to hand weed. Using a good layer of mulch around the palm will not only help to suppress weeds but also keep the ground moist and provide food for the plant. Do not however place the mulch against the trunk of the palm.

### Pruning

To keep your palm tree looking good it's necessary to periodically prune it. While this can be done at any time of the year it's often most effective in late spring when new growth is appearing and old leaves are dying off. Since palms re-use the nutrients in their old leaves it's best to wait until there is no green left on the leaf before pruning. Prune the leaf as close to the trunk as possible but in order to avoid scaring do not attempt to pull the leaf base off. Instead allow it to drop off in good time. Depending upon your preference you may wish to remove fruit and flowers too.

### Pests

There are few pests in New Zealand that can cause serious harm to palm trees. If you are fortunate enough to live in the bush you may need to take additional precautions but for most of us cutting off fruit to discourage birds and rats is about all that's needed. For indoor palms a periodic application of insecticide may be necessary to control mites and scale.

### Fertilising

To maintain a healthy palm tree it's important to fertilise regularly. This is actually a quick and easy task if carried out correctly. Below we've summarised the key points to be aware of:

- Use a fertiliser with an NPK ratio of 3:1:3. Thus 9:3:9 or 6:2:6 is also acceptable.
- Slow release fertiliser is preferable as it works better and is safer for the palm. That said, a good fertilising regime may balance slow release with a boost in spring and be supplemented with organic fertilising during the year.
- Whilst the bulk of the elements a plant requires are N (nitrogen), P (phosphorus) and K (potassium) they also require calcium (Ca), magnesium (Mg), and sulphur (S) as well as trace elements; boron (B), chlorine (Cl), copper (Cu), iron (Fe), manganese (Mn), molybdenum (Mo), zinc (Zn) and nickel (Ni). For this reason use a fertiliser that contains 'micronutrients' or 'microelements'.
- Using slow release fertiliser it's best to apply a small amount in spring, summer and early autumn.

When fertilising there are a few points to note:

- Fertilise only when the ground is moist and water in well afterwards.
- Avoid over-fertilising palm trees. This can be fatal.
- Scatter fertiliser right around the base of the palm and out as far the distance that the fronds reach from the trunk.
- Avoid getting fertiliser in the crown of the palm or in a pile against the trunk.