

Declining Phoenix and Queen Palms in Kings Point, Sun City Center , FL

Fusarium Wilt is a lethal disease that is spread from palm to palm and can be caused by contaminated pruning tools. Its cause is a fungus, which was at first found mainly in Canary Island Date Palms where it caused browning of frond leaflets on one side at a time only. The fungus produces short-lived spores and chalydospores, **spores that will live in the soil and plant tissue for years**. Since most of the root system is left behind after a palm dies from this disease, the root mass may act as a reservoir for the fungus for long time. Nothing should be planted where the diseased palm was for a couple of years. At this time there is not a cure available for this fungus. Once a tree is infected it will die. It is advised to remove the contaminated tree from the premises once recognized to avoid spreading the disease.

Fusarium Wilt can be identified by the symptoms of a characteristic stripe along the stem of the frond and that *one side* of the frond will have died beginning first in the lower fronds. The condition graduates up towards the top of the palm. To confirm the disease a frond sample must be sent to the University Plant Pathology lab in Gainesville. Diseased palms should not be chipped or used as mulch in the landscape.

Fusarium fungus is a source of decline in Queen Palms that university pathologists have identified as an agent *very similar* to the Fusarium wilt. It has also been acknowledged in Washingtonia Palms.

Texas Phoenix Palm Decline (or TPPD) is defined by the rapid death of lower fronds that turn a reddish brown from the original green. The leaves stay in the same position when they get infected, and do not droop. The fruit will turn black and drop prematurely.

TPPD is suspected to be spread by sap sucking insects such as a leaf hoppers, of which the particular species is unknown. It is caused by a **phytoplasma**, which are pathogens.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phytoplasma>

Texas Phoenix Palm Decline is spread by an unknown insect, *not* by pruning. This disease can be arrested by injecting antibiotics into the trunk three times per year for the life of the plant. Once treatments cease, the disease will progress until the death of the Palm. If you have an infected tree. It is advised to remove the contaminated tree from the premises once recognized to avoid spreading the disease to other palms in the area.

All Date Palm *species* have been victimized of one of these diseases. This disease is confirmed by drilling core samples from the trunk of the tree, and sending the fresh tissue to the University of Fort Lauderdale's Research station where it can be tested in a fashion similar to DNA testing. These tests are done for a fee. Palm problems are not easy to diagnose. If you suspect a problem, please contact us for an inspection. If a second opinion is required, Hillsborough County Extension Office is recommended.

The information for this article was provided by John Cornelius of ValleyCrest, Paul G. Woods, OLM, the University of Florida IFAS Extension Office, and Stormy Holloway of Sterling Management Services.