

Protecting your palms against an unknown disease in Florida

The Sabal Palm is Florida's state tree and is under attack by a microscopic killer that has scientists stumped. A growing number of Sabal palms in the Tampa Bay area have died from a mysterious disease that researchers are struggling to identify. A variety of factors have contributed to new and greater numbers of palm-prone disease and pests, among them warmer temperatures in our growing zone and improper pruning that puts the palms at greater risk of disease. Even after scientists pinpoint the disease they will have to learn what insect spreads it. The challenge is making the diagnosis. Early identification, diagnosis and removal of sick palms will prevent the spread of diseases to others.

Sabal Palms are also known as cabbage palms, Palmetto, Cabbage Palmetto, and Sabal Palmetto. The tree is native to the southeastern United States, Cuba, and the Bahamas. In the United States it occurs throughout Florida and coastal Georgia, Coastal South Carolina, and North Carolina. This is the state tree of South Carolina and Florida. The Sabal Palm grows up 65 ft in height, with a trunk up to 2 ft in diameter. It is a fan palm with the leaves with a bare petiole terminating in a round fan of numerous leaflets. Each leaf is 5-6.5 feet long, with 40-60 leaflets up to 2.6 ft long.



There are five strategies that can boost the health of your palms and their ability to fight disease. With their healthy green fronds, it will be easier for you to catch the problems early. First, fertilize palms this month. Don't use just any fertilizer. Experts recommend a special time released formula. Second, don't prune green fronds. Over-pruning increases the palms' susceptibility to diseases and worsens any nutritional deficiencies. Third, if you do prune, always use sanitized tools. Clean blades with a diluted bleach solution and if you employ a tree service, insist that equipment is cleaned before use on your property and between individual palms. Fourth, diagnose palm problems

early consult your county's extension service to determine if your palm is diseased or has a nutritional deficiency. And last but not least plant native palms. They are resistant to most diseases and low maintenance. Good choices for our area include cabbage palm and saw palmetto. The information for this article was provided by Wikipedia, the Times, Paul G. Woods of OLM, John Cornelius of ValleyCrest, and Libby Hernandez of Sterling Management Services.

