

# FAIRCHILD TROPICAL BOTANIC GARDEN

Exploring, Explaining and Conserving the World of Tropical Plants

## Schoolyard Palmetum

### What is a palmetum?

A palmetum is a collection of palms. Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden has a palmetum where it collects, displays, and conserves different palm species. The palmetum is used for education, scientific research, and conservation.

### Why develop a schoolyard palmetum?

South Florida has a subtropical environment that allows palms to grow well. No matter where you are in South Florida, you should be able to see several different types of palms. Although the palm family has approximately 2500 species of palms, we commonly see only 12 to 15 different types.

Although many of the palms in your schoolyard may not be native to South Florida, they are most likely the species that students will encounter often. Educational research shows that students are often more motivated to learn about concepts that are easily accessible to them. Teaching students the names of the different palms in their schoolyard may help to increase their interest in biology and other environmental concepts. Schoolyard palmetums, natural ecosystems, and school gardens can also increase community involvement at your school. Palmetums also allow educators and students the chance to start with a small project and elaborate at their own time frame.

Possible expansion activities:

Year 1: identify and label existing trees

Year 2: plant and label new types of palms OR create an interpretative map guiding students and visitors through the palmetum

Year 3: expand portions of the palmetum to represent a specific type of ecosystem such as a Florida hammocks area

Palms are a major source of economic products including the coconut (*Cocos*), dates (*Phoenix*), oils (*Attalea*, American oil palm, *Elaeis*, African oil palm), starch or sago (*Metroxylon*), edible hearts of palm (many genera), rattan (*Calamus*). Many palms are also used as ornamentals.

Caution: Watch out for palm look-a-likes. The Traveler's Palm (more correctly the Traveler's tree, a banana relative) is not a palm, nor is the sago "palm" (a cone-bearing cycad) or the Ponytail "palm" (a lily relative).



### Starting your schoolyard palmetum

A. Walk around your schoolyard and look for existing palms that could be included in your schoolyard palmetum. Decide which area you would like to focus on. Will your palmetum include all the palms in your schoolyard or do you want to make your palmetum in a smaller portion of the schoolyard?

Think about your future goals of the area when you select a site.

1. Is your site in a permanent location or is it likely to be disrupted in the future?
2. Are you planning on expanding the palmetum with additional plantings?
3. Are you planning on restoring the area surrounding the palmetum to a natural habitat?
4. Do you want the community to have access to your palmetum?
5. Are you planning on creating an interpretative map or placing additional signs around the palmetum?

B. After you have identified the area you would like to focus on, select palms to label.

C. Identify each palm. The references listed above can help with identification. You can also find many good references online (<http://palmguide.org/index.php>).

D. Create labels for each palm using the format provided in the example label or create your own label format. Laminate the labels or use a durable fabric to increase the durability of the labels.


F. Attach the labels to each palm using thin wire. Adding a few twists to the wire will provide a little extra room for growth. Most palms do not have large increases in girth but a little extra room will prevent the wire from cutting into the trunk.



Suggested label information in correct format:

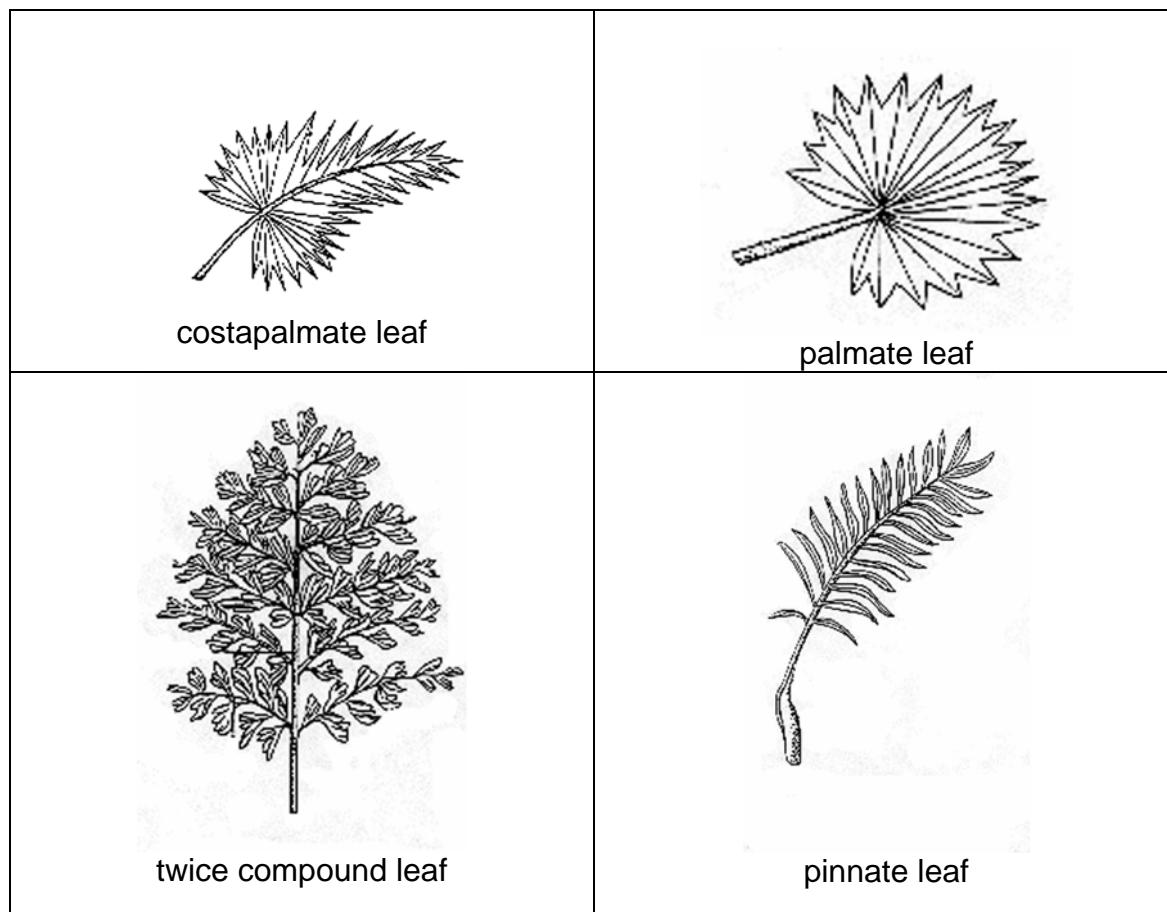
<p><i>Scientific name</i> Common name(s)</p> <p>Family name (Arecaceae – all palms are in the Arecaceae family)</p> <p>Native region</p> <p>Other information: Date palm was planted (if applicable) Important economic uses Growth form (habit) and leaf type</p>
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Example label:

<p><i>Sabal palmetto</i> Cabbage Palm</p> <p>Arecaceae</p> <p>Native to the Southeastern United States, Cuba, and the Bahamas</p> <p>Planted October 2, 1989</p> <p>The <i>Sabal palmetto</i> is the state tree of Florida and South Carolina. It is a solitary palm with a single stem and has costapalmate leaves.</p> 
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Placing a picture of the leaf type or the growth habit on the label will help the students associate specific characteristics with individual plants. A few examples are provided to cut and paste onto the labels. Students can also identify if a palm is solitary (has a single stem) or clumping (has multiple stems).



### References

Fairchild Guide to Palms. Center for Tropical Plant Conservation, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden. Available at: <http://palmguide.org/index.php>.

Stevenson, George B. Palms of South Florida. University Press of Florida, Miami, 1996.

Tomlinson, P.B. The Structural Biology of Palms. Oxford University Press, New York, 1990

For help with palm identification or planting advice, contact Tim McKernan from the South Florida Palm Society, at [palmtim@bellsouth.net](mailto:palmtim@bellsouth.net).

