

# SOME PALMS PROVIDE "BLUE" COLOR IN THE LANDSCAPE

By Ralph E. Mitchell, *Director/Horticulture Agent of Charlotte County Extension Service*

When we think of the color blue in landscape plants, there are many different shades that come to mind - Plumbago with its sky blue flowers, for instance. However, "blue" foliage conjures up images of a powdery, silver-blue color that stands out in contrast to the basic green leaf color of most plants. There are certain palms that best display this color within their elegant, tropical fronds. Starting from gigantic to small, let's look at the Bismarck palm, the Pindo palm and a certain type of Saw-palmetto.

Making a striking appearance, the Bismarck palm has become very popular in our area. Imagine at maturity a palm growing from 25 up to 50 feet tall with individual fronds at least four-foot long! The size and presence of this palm is matched only by its waxy blue to blue-green color. The Bismarck palm requires a well-drained soil, full sun and lots of room to grow. What starts out as a cute little palm planted too close to the house will soon turn into a behemoth needing to be moved. While a single specimen will fit into a residential landscape, multiple specimens look best in commercial or large residential settings. Think how a row of Bismarck palms spaced 15 feet apart would look on each side of a walkway or entry road! Very drought and salt-tolerant, Bismarck's are rated as slow growers. This is a relative term as I have seen some specimens grow fairly rapidly.

Smaller in size, but still making an accent to a landscape, the Pindo palm is another silvery, blue-green beauty. Growing to an ultimate height of 25 feet, this palm is truly slow-growing. Its fronds are strongly-recurved which gives the palm a rounded look. The trunk is stocky in appearance and it retains its old leaf bases adding to its texture. Also known as the Jelly palm, large clusters of orangey-yellow edible fruits ripen

in summer. The fruits are as large as dates and can actually be used to make jams and jellies. The taste reminds me of pineapple. The fruit produced can also be messy, so make sure to situate your Pindo away from walkways. Pindos are very adapted to our soils and climate and are also drought tolerant.



***Bismarck Palm***

Last, but not least in our list is the East Coast version of the Saw-palmetto. While you may be used to the green-leafed variety common to the West Coast of Florida, there is a variety that is a light, bluish-green that makes a welcome change in the landscape palette. We have a few planted outside our office complex which are doing very well. Saw-palmettos grow slowly in their natural habitat with one figure of 0.1 inch of growth per year recorded in Central Florida. Slowly growing to 10-15 feet in length, some estimates show individual plants may be as old as 500 years or more. As the plant grows the stems lie on the ground. Important to wildlife for food and shelter, Saw-palmettos also look good as a native in your landscape plan. The East Coast blue-

green variety is sometimes available at local native plant nurseries. Started from seed and containerized, these palms can easily be transplanted into the landscape.

All three of these palms are examples of plants that will add a shade of blue to your landscape and eye appeal to your plant palette.

For more information on all types of plants, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3, in Port Charlotte. Our Plant Clinics are available across the county:

- **Demonstration Garden (6900 Florida Street, PG)** Thursdays 9:00am-11:00am.
- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** Thursdays 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Mid-County Regional Library** 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of month 1:00pm-3:00pm.
- **Edison College Learning Resources Library** 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of month 1:00pm-4:00pm.
- **South Gulf Cove Learning Garden** 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of month 9:00am-12:00pm.

Monthly Plant Clinics are Saturdays 9:00am-12:00pm at the following locations:

- **Peachland Promenades Publix** 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of month.
- **Home Depot Murdock & Home Depot Punta Gorda** 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of month.
- **Lowe's Garden Center Murdock** 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday of month.

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For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4340. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

*Resource:*

*Gilman, E.F. & Watson, D.G. (2006) Bismarckia nobilis: Bismarck Palm. UF/IFAS Extension Service.*

*Gilman, E.F. & Watson, D.G. (2006) Butia capitata: Pindo Palm. UF/IFAS Extension Service.*

*Tanner, T.W., Mullahey & Maehr, D. (2002) Saw-palmetto: an Ecologically and Economically Important Native Palm. UF/IFAS Extension Service.*