

WHEN IS A PALM PROBLEM NOT A PALM PROBLEM?

By Ralph E. Mitchell

Appearances can be deceiving. One plant's apparent abnormality may actually be perfectly normal. Case in point is a palm that may have an abnormal appearance, but is actually perfectly fine. This article will highlight a few of the most common palm non-problems that homeowners may encounter.

Palm roots grow from the base of the trunk. This root initiation zone expands as the palms grow. Some roots try to grow above the ground and never fully develop. You can sometimes see these partially developed root knobs on some types of palms. Older palms may even have roots that develop under the outer woody tissue of the palm causing the "bark" to flare out at the base of the trunk. This may look like the bark is beginning to roll up like a banana peel, but no need to worry - it is just a normal manifestation of a maturing palm. The degree of bark flares may vary from palm to palm.

Have you ever heard of scurf on palm leaves? The young leaves of pygmy date palms have a white material on them that can be mistaken for scale insects. This material called scurf is harmless residue that eventually falls off. Foxtail palms have black scurf on the bases of the frond stems that looks just like sooty mold - a relatively harmless mold that grows on the honeydew excretions of aphids, scales, or mealy bugs. Again, scurf is not a problem, just a natural material that is actually part of the palm.

Not all coconut palms are green. Normally, yellowing leaves and stems in coconuts may be a sign of a nutrient deficiency. However, there are several varieties of coconuts such as 'Golden' and 'Yellow Malayan Dwarf' which

have yellow to orange-red stems, flowers and even young fruit - all normal for this genetic variation.

There are a couple of palm frond variations which should be considered normal. Sabal or Cabbage palms, for instance, have an area of clear, yellow-green tissue at the center of the frond. While this may be mistaken for potassium deficiency, it is normal for this species. Another example of mistaken nutrient deficiency can appear on clustering palms such as arecas. In this normal abnormality, the first leaf from a side shoot is crumpled. The second leaf may have some crumpling or it can be completely normal. This could easily be confused with boron deficiency.



Coconut Palms (*Cocos nucifera*)
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As with many cases in gardening, find out what the real situation is before taking action - something that looks wrong may be perfectly normal.

If you spot a plant problem that you can't seem to figure out, 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:

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

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

- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** 1st Saturday of month.
- **Peachland Promenades Publix** - 2nd Saturday of month.
- **Home Depot Murdock & Home Depot Punta Gorda** - 3rd 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:

Broschat, T.K. & Elliot, M. L. (2007) Normal "Abnormalities" in Plants. The University of Florida Extension Service, IFAS.