

June Gardening Guide

By: Patricia Porchey

Has anyone ever knocked on your door and asked to trim your palms and a week later you notice driving down the street that every palm has a “hurricane cut?” In fact, driving around Sarasota any season of the year, one is sure to see “hurricane-cut” palm trees. This time of year, however, pruning is done out of fear. In reality, “hurricane cut” is a misnomer because misinformation has given everyone the impression that this is the way to prune a palm to withstand hurricane-force winds when in fact, it’s overpruning.

This practice of overpruning weakens the palm structurally and stresses the palm making it more susceptible to fungal diseases such as Ganoderma and insects such as palm weevils. Palms naturally translocate nutrients to younger foliage from the older fronds so unnecessary frond removal deprives the palm of needed nutrients. Repeated “hurricane-cut” pruning produces a phenomenon known as “pencil top,” a narrowed trunk just below the fronds that increases the likelihood of trunk failure. Damage assessments done after our recent hurricanes have shown that those palms in good health and properly pruned with green fronds left intact were able to absorb the shock of the stronger winds much better than those overpruned. As a result, several counties on the east coast have made “hurricane cuts” illegal.

The correct way to prune palms is to remove only those fronds blow the horizontal (or nine and three o’clock position). Better yet is to only remove those fronds that are dead or almost dead and seed pods. Don’t let fear cause you to make the wrong decision when hiring someone to prune your palms.

Gardening activities

- When selecting new trees to plant, pick trees with good limb structure – spacing up and around main stem.
- Know the tree’s mature size to avoid planting it is too small a space or too close to structures – a large tree should be at least 25 feet from the foundation.
- Prune existing trees to remove dead, broken, diseased, and crossing branches.
- Thin the canopy to allow air movement, but do not top trees as this makes the trees more susceptible to damage from insects, disease and wind.
- Check for mole cricket damage in Bahia and Bermuda lawns and treat only if needed.
- Check for chinch bug damage in St. Augustine lawns. Treat just the problem area plus an additional five foot radius instead of the whole yard.
- If rust mite damage was a problem on your citrus last year, spray a less toxic solution such as horticultural soap or oil now.
- Amend beds with organic matter before planting summer annuals.
- As summer rains begin, get in the habit of only watering as needed. Check the rain shutoff device on your irrigation system to see that it is working properly.

Upcoming educational classes:

- “Trees & Hurricanes” at Twin Lakes Park, June 6 at 2:00 pm. Call 861-9900 to register.
- “Trees & Hurricanes” at Twin Lakes Park, June 14 at 10:00 am. Call 861-9900
- “Beneficial Insects” at Shamrock Park, June 20 at 2:00 pm. Call 486-2706 or 861-9900 to register.

Planting guide:

Vegetables & Herbs(plant herbs from transplants and vegetables from seeds or transplants): Basil, borage, catnip, collard and mustard greens, eggplant, lemon balm, marjoram, mint, okra, oregano, rosemary, southern peas, summer savory, sweet potatoes, thyme and turnip.

Annuals: Begonia Celosia, Coleus, Crossandra, Gazania, Gerbera daisy, Gomphrena, marigold, Melampodium, Nicotiana, periwinkle, Portulaca, Salvia, Torenia, and Zinnia.

Perennials: Blue daze, Gaillardia, Coreopsis, daylily, Pentas, *Ruellia caroliniensis* (native), Salvia, Shasta daisy, society garlic, Stokes aster and Verbena.

Fruits in season: Banana, blueberry, Carambola, guava, citrus (calamondin, key lime, lemon and lime), Jackfruit, fig, kumquat, lychee, macadamia, mango, papaya and pineapple.

Blooming plants: African tulip tree, Allamanda, beautyberry, bird of paradise, Cannas, crape jasmine, crape myrtle, dwarf Poinciana, Gardenia, Jerusalem thorn, Magnolia, Mexican flame vine, ponytail palm, Plumbago, royal Poinciana, society garlic, thryallis, and Yucca.

If you have questions concerning your landscape, please call or visit our office at Twin Lakes Park on Clark Road east of I-75. The **Master Gardener Help Desk** is open Monday-Friday from 9:00 am-Noon and 1:00-4:00 pm (941-861-9807). Our satellite help desks at the five county libraries are open through the summer.

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“Hurricane-cut” palms are overpruned.