

PALM LITERATURE

ORTHO® ALL ABOUT PALMS. Paul Craft, Meredith Books, Des Moines, Iowa. 2008. ISBN 978-0-23604-4. US\$12.95. Softcover. 128 pp.

All About Palms is intended to be an introductory how-to book on palms targeted at an audience primarily of homeowners and landscapers. Because the book is a mass marketed, it carries a low cover price. In addition to bookstores, the book is broadly available in most home improvement centers and even some supermarkets, as well as on-line in booksellers.

The impetus for this book project came on the heels of the success of *An Encyclopedia of Cultivated Palms* (Timber Press, 2003) that Craft co-authored (with Robert Riffle) and that became a standard non-technical reference book on palms. Surprisingly, while there are how-to guidebooks on just about every subject, few (if any) are available about palms. One similar book which appeared recently is *Betrock's Essential Guide to Palms* by David Leaser (Betrock Information Systems, Inc., 2007). Meredith Gardening Books publishes the Ortho® series of do-it-yourself guidebooks and approached Craft to undertake the project.

Paul Craft has the ideal credentials to write this type of reference book about palms. He is an expert horticultural consultant who has worked on many large landscaping projects in Florida and elsewhere. In the past, he was the owner of a wholesale nursery specializing in palms, cycads and exotic ornamentals. Along with his practical experience, Craft is the past-president of the International Palm Society.

All About Palms was released at a book signing event at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden in April 2008. In conjunction with the symposium, Craft gave a presentation entitled "Palm That Won't Grow Here." It was essentially the antithesis of his new book in which he related all of his "negative know-how" (what not to do) about growing palms. While the book discusses the methods that are successful for growing palms, knowledge of the multitude of mistakes to avoid is where his years of practical experience are evident.

Given the intended target audience for this book, the first four chapters start out logically with the basics. The first chapter is a "palm primer" that covers at its most basic level palm morphology, taxonomy and even some ethnobotany. It then transitions into the four

basic cultural requirements of light, temperature, soil and water. Again, this is clearly a book for beginners (which we all were at one time).

In the second chapter, Craft accomplishes in just a few pages an explanation of the essentials of landscape design using palms. He explains that, to create a successful garden, one must consider the growth habits and cultural requirements of palms in conjunction with the design objectives of the garden. How many highly-experienced palm gardeners do not heed this type of advice and wind up with a jumbled palm collection with no cohesive design?

The practical information on planting and maintaining palms is in the third chapter. It covers a long list of basic horticultural topics: Buying a containerized palm, planting it, staking, fertilizing and mulching, watering, pruning, frost protection and seed germination (probably advanced for a beginner's how-to book).

The final introductory (fourth) chapter covers pests and diseases. Craft restricts the list of pests to the most common and controllable: mealy-bugs, aphids, scale and mites. Discussing fungal problems and control can be complicated even for the professional, so Craft mostly avoids delving too deeply and discusses a few lethal problems that do not have any treatment options. He also gives brief attention to environmental and cultural problems. The comment that closes this chapter is an indictment on palm collectors in zone denial: "It's natural for gardeners to try to extend the growing range of plants they like, but trying to grow palms unsuited to your climate can be frustrating."

The remainder of *All About Palms* contains the requisite directory called the "Gallery of Palms." It covers 175 species of palms presented alphabetically by scientific name on 49 pages, or about 40% of the total book length. In addition, there is a much shorter "Palmlike Plant Gallery" some compatible plants such as cycads, tree ferns, pandanus, dracaenas and such. The Gallery section gives a short general description, some horticultural requirements and landscape uses. A common name is provided for every species, even though many probably did not have a common name before publication of this book. Palm hardiness based on a minimum temperature is a tricky guideline since a major factor is the duration of the cold period.

