Veitchia merrillii: Christmas Palm

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Introduction

This stocky, single-trunked palm with stiffly arched, six-foot-long, bright green fronds is noted for the fall and winter appearance of the very showy clusters of glossy, bright red fruits which hang below the leaves at the base of the crown shaft. Reaching 25 feet in height, though often much smaller, Christmas Palm has a very neat appearance and is well-suited to use as a patio, terrace, specimen, or framing tree. Unfortunately, the palm is very susceptible to lethal yellowing disease and probably should not be planted. Fortunately, there are other Veitchia resistant to the disease, including Veitchia macdanialsi and Veitchia montgomeryana, but these are much taller palms with thicker trunks.

General Information

Scientific name: Veitchia merrillii
Pronunciation: VEE-chee-uh mer-RILL-ee-eye
Common name(s): Christmas Palm, Manila Palm
Family: Arecaceae

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Invasive potential: little invasive potential
Uses: indoors; street without sidewalk; deck or patio; specimen; container or planter; sidewalk cutout (tree pit)
Availability: not native to North America

Description

Height: 20 to 30 feet
Spread: 10 to 15 feet
Crown uniformity: symmetrical
Crown shape: palm, upright/erect
Crown density: open
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: medium
Veitchia merrillii: Christmas Palm

Figure 1. Middle-aged Veitchia merrillii: Christmas Palm

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: odd-pinnately compound
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: lanceolate
Leaf venation: parallel
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches, 12 to 18 inches
Leaf color: green

Fall color: no color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: yellow, white/cream/gray
Flower characteristics: not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval
Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: red
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches don't droop; showy; typically one trunk; thorns
Pruning requirement: little required
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: not applicable
Current year twig thickness:
Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained
Drought tolerance: moderate
Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: not a problem
Use and Management

Christmas Palm should receive some shade while young but will grow in full sun when older on a wide variety of well-drained soils, including limestone soils. Trees should only be used in frost-free areas. Consider substituting one of the Veitchia mentioned above, the Carpentaria Palm, Ptychosperma macarthurii, or a variety of other palms resistant to lethal yellowing disease.

Winter interest: yes
Outstanding tree: no
Ozone sensitivity: unknown
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: resistant
Pest resistance: sensitive to pests/diseases

Propagation is by seed.

Pests
Scales can infest and spoil young palms.

Diseases
It is very susceptible to lethal yellowing disease.