

Phoenix reclinata: Senegal Date Palm¹

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Introduction

This striking palm creates an interesting silhouette with its multiple, gracefully curved, often reclining, slender brown trunks, and dense crowns of stiff but feathery leaf fronds. Old frond bases are medium brown and remain on the trunk forming a showy trunk which is attractive all year long. A mature specimen of Senegal date palm can reach 35 feet in height with a 12 to 20-foot-spread and creates a striking tree which casts a light shade. The palm is elegant when lit from below at night. It is best used as an accent for large landscapes and parks. The somewhat showy flower stalks, often lost within the thick foliage, are followed by one-inch-long, reddish-brown dates which are incredibly showy. These can be very attractive, particularly when viewed from a balcony above the tree.

General Information

Scientific name: *Phoenix reclinata*

Pronunciation: FEE-nicks reck-lih-NAY-tuh

Common name(s): senegal date palm

Family: *Arecaceae* or *Palmae*

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Figure 2)

Origin: native to Africa and Madagascar

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: invasive and not recommended (South); not considered a problem species at this time, may be recommended (North, Central)

Uses: specimen; container or planter



Figure 1. Full Form - *Phoenix reclinata*: senegal date palm
Credits: UF/IFAS

Description

Height: 25 to 35 feet

Spread: 12 to 20 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular

Crown shape: palm, upright/erect

Crown density: open

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: medium

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Figure 2. Range

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: odd-pinnately compound

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: linear

Leaf venation: parallel

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 12 to 15 feet; leaflets are 1 foot

Leaf color: bright to deep green

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy



Figure 3. Leaf - *Phoenix reclinata*: senegal date palm
Credits: UF/IFAS

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristics: showy; emerges in clusters on 2-3' long, orange, branched panicles



Figure 4. Flower - *Phoenix reclinata*: senegal date palm
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Fruit

xFruit shape: ovate

Fruit length: ½ to 1 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy date

Fruit color: reddish-brown

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem; males do not produce fruit

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches don't droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns

Bark: brown and fibrous underneath the crown, then gray and smooth, with closely set rings along the rest of the trunk

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: not applicable

Current year twig thickness:

Wood specific gravity: unknown



Figure 5. Fruit - *Phoenix reclinata*: senegal date palm
Credits: UF/IFAS



Figure 6. Spines - *Phoenix reclinata*: senegal date palm
Credits: UF/IFAS



Figure 7. Bark - *Phoenix reclinata*: senegal date palm
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Culture

Light requirement: full sun to partial shade

Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; well-drained

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: no

Outstanding tree: yes

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: resistant

Pest resistance: sensitive to pests/diseases

Use and Management

The multiple trunks lose older fronds as the palm grows, clearing lower trunks of all foliage. This characteristic makes Senegal Date Palm a wonderful tree for accenting in a bed of groundcover or a grouping of low shrubs. Trunks which bend to the horizontal as the palm ages may need to be supported with a brace or cable to hold them up.

Growing easily in full sun or partial shade, Senegal Date Palm will thrive on any well-drained soil. Plants should receive adequate moisture during periods of drought. This palm is too large for all but the largest residential landscapes. They are very costly to purchase due to the slow growth rate. Large specimens command a high price.

Propagation is by seed or division of the many suckers which appear at the base of old clumps.

Pests

A variety of scales infest this palm.

Diseases

Some diseases of this tree are lethal yellowing disease, leaf spot.

Stressed and damaged trees often are infected with the Ganoderma fungus. A conk is formed at the base of the tree which appears as a varnished shelf or mushroom. Remove the conk and the tree to help control the spread of the disease to other plants. Prevent injury to the trunk and roots, and plant in well-drained soil. Be sure sprinklers do not irrigate the trunk so it remains wet. A wet trunk and wet soil encourage this disease. There is no control for butt rot, only prevention.

Lethal bronzing (formerly Texas Phoenix Palm Decline) has been found to affect this palm tree species.

References

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