

LEARN MORE
([HTTP://OFFERS.DESERTSUN.COM/SPECIALOFFER?
GPS-
SOURCE=BENB{MONTH_ABBREVIATED}&UTM_MEDIUM=NANOBAR&UTM_SOURCE=BOU
EXCHANGE&UTM_CAMPAIGN=READLOCAL17](http://offers.desertsun.com/specialoffer?GPS-SOURCE=BENB{MONTH_ABBREVIATED}&UTM_MEDIUM=NANOBAR&UTM_SOURCE=BOU EXCHANGE&UTM_CAMPAIGN=READLOCAL17))

Take better care of your queen palms

Maureen Gilmer Published 9:00 p.m. PT Oct. 13, 2016



(Photo: Maureen Gilmer)

Queen palms all over the Coachella Valley are suffering. Most aren't looking good this year because they have been neglected. Pivotal to many landscapes, they are often in high profile locations such as entries and beyond the pool views. When these focal point trees start looking ratty, the adjacent spaces begin to feel that way too.

Since 1900, the great South American queen palm has changed botanical names three times. It first identified it as *Cocos plumosa*, then midcentury it became *Arecastrum romanzoffianum*. Now they've got a new genus: *Syagrus romanzoffiana*, the most beautiful palm in southern California.

The queen palm produces some of the longest fronds, reaching 20 feet under ideal conditions. The center rib is lined with three foot long pendulous leaflets that are crimped for a truly feminine foliage texture. Even the slightest air movement makes the leaflets vibrate, a breeze begins the sway, and wind animates an ever changing shadow pattern in outdoor living spaces.

Here in the low desert, queen palms have always been borderline, even under standard irrigation in normal rain years. Now with extended drought and irrigation interruption, most queens went from borderline to absolute decline over this last year.

A healthy queen should have a lush head of long hair and flower annually if provided enough water. If suffering she'll brown out, drop fronds, quit flowering or over flower, and the head dies back gradually. After all fronds have died the trunk may live for a time, but there's no way to predict survival under those conditions. However, queen palms are super fast growing so they can come back just as fast if there's still life in the trunk.

The problem is that desert queen palms get the supplemental rain from monsoons didn't come. They also had to contend with an abnormally dry winter and absence of late summer humidity. This combination has robbed both plant and soil of every bit of residual moisture.

Where new landscapes replace a water demanding lawn, the queens adjacent that thrived on the turf irrigation are too often forgotten. Once conditions change they quickly demonstrate their unhappiness by browning the leaves incrementally as internal moisture declines. Dieback in any plant is the way they reduce the demand for water generated by the leaves.



Years ago I wrote about how much more water queens need than our Washintonia fans and Phoenix date type species. Queens don't originate in such dry climates so they're not geared for prolonged summer drought. Only by pouring water directly into the root system can this slow death by drought be stopped so there's a chance they'll survive until rains return. Failure to do so can cause the loss of beautiful old trees that are irreplaceable.

To help this or any suffering palm, know that they are a lot like grasses that love nitrogen. When the old lawn is removed, all that high nitrogen turf fertilizer stops suddenly. The result is that palm is not only dehydrating to death, it's dying of starvation at the same time. This is why it's very important to use liquid base nitrogen fertilizer after you've rehydrated the root zone to stimulate regrowth.

Join now for as low as
\$10/month

Subscribe Now
(http://offers.desertsun.com/specialoffer?gps-source=BEAZ{month_abbreviated}&utm_medium=agilityzone&utm_source=boundexchange&utm_campaign=UWEB2017)

Untitled note

Save

Clip

Article

● Simplified article

Full page

Bookmark

Screenshot

Organize

source's notebook

Add tag

Add remark

Read or Share this story: <http://desert.sn/2exMzas>

Options

The queen palm has one of the most visually suitable trunk for small space gardens, which demonstrates why she is so valuable where yards are tiny. With a more well behaved root system it will not pressure adjacent structures or paving. They also do well in very large pots. Queens look best where sheltered from direct winds, but if provided enough water to compensate they are surprisingly survivable.

These queens are civilized growers, not rank with seed nor spined like the fans, and won't dominate like the big date palms. Queen palm trunks are shaggy in youth, but after a decade they clean up to a smooth, clean and gray color. That gray is there to remind you how long it takes to reach old age and how much special care we all need in good times and in bad.