

Properly Pruning Palm Trees in Phoenix: What You Should Know

Annual pruning of your palms can not only make them tidy for the scheme of your landscape, but it also promotes the health and longevity of your tree. It is always up to the owner's discretion whether to trim back the dead leaves or not, often for just visual effect. However, there are a few things to keep in mind when deciding to do it yourself. The other option, of course, is to call a trained professional in the business. This is both a convenient and safe method of caring for your landscape and trees.

There are many types of palms and several methods of caring for them. Generally, annual maintenance will ensure the quality of your palms, but there are always extenuating circumstances that may result in other problems such as root rot, root-knot nematode, lightning, high winds, etc. We will deal with general maintenance here.

First thing for those with tall palms that require climbing, *DO NOT* use equipment that will puncture or wound your palms such as tree climbing spurs. This will allow an opening, for example, for insects to compromise the infrastructure, causing disease and possible destruction of the tree. Use techniques such as these:

- An A-frame ladder
- Rent a hydraulic lift from your local equipment rental yard
- A pole saw
- Long-handled hedge clippers and loppers

The first thing you should know is the best time to trim your palms, especially in Arizona. If dead branches and leaves are left alone and with incoming storms and high winds, then personal property damage could occur or even worse property damage to a friend and neighbor. Not to mention it is crucial for the tree's health to trim back dead and dying leaves and branches. It is best to consider pruning when your tree has brown, yellow or broken fronds, or leaves. Do this in late spring. Remove any petioles, or boots, flowers or fruit stalks, by hand if you are able to so as to not damage the trunk. The fruits, for example, of a Date Palm can be both infertile and fertile, bearing seeds that make an unpleasant mess. The fruit, if matured, can drop also causing a mess, not to mention becoming food for unwanted pests such as scorpions and pigeons that will nest in or near your palms.

Says Elizabeth Davison of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Arizona, "...pruning too high up the crown or too close to the trunk can cause damage, disease, water uptake problems, or trunk constriction."

Tips for the Novice Palm Tree Trimmer

1. Devise a plan before hoisting up your machete and brutally, and perhaps fatally, chopping up your palms
2. Always use protective gear:
 - Goggles or some sort of eye protection
 - Thick leather gloves
 - Long sleeve shirt and pants
3. Only trim away those brown fronds towards the bottom. The main growth area of a palm is in the upper middle section. Stay away from this area when trimming.
4. When the tips of the healthy fronds become brown, carefully trim them back being extra careful to cut at an angle to preserve the natural shape of each frond.
5. Never cut off green branches and fronds. This is detrimental to the life of the palm.
6. Do not take off more fronds than the palm can produce in a year. This weakens the tree and makes it susceptible to disease and infection, high winds and fatality.

Regardless of the types of palms or the area in which you live, pruning palms isn't easy nor is it very enjoyable, especially if you are doing it for the first time. Call a professional that can make it look easy and do the job right. Cost often varies from palm to palm. Contact a reputable Phoenix tree trimming company that specializes in palm tree pruning to give you a quote today.