

PLANTING YOUR PALM

There are a number of considerations when planting a palm. Although many people choose a one-gallon to three-gallon size due to the ease of handling and the greater availability, the palms will not stay small for long.

The *Trachycarpus Fortunei* (Chinese Windmill Palm) will eventually grow to a height of 25 to 30 feet (7.5m to 9m), with some exceptional plants growing to a height of 40 feet (12m). The spread of the fronds reaches 10 feet (3m) in diameter. *Trachycarpus Wagnerianus* (Waggie Palm) is smaller than the *T. Fortunei*, growing to a height of 18 to 23 feet (5.5m to 7m), with a frond spread reaching 6 feet in diameter.

Distances from Structures:

The palm trees are monocots, the roots grow from one spot, and the fronds also grow from one location. There is no tap root or main roots, rather there are thousands of roots that radiate from the base of the palm. This allows palms to be planted close to hardscape (retaining walls, walkways, foundations) without fear that the walls or walkways will lift or crack.

The fronds of the palms, and the overall height impact the location more noticeably. The width of the mature palms varies by variety; however, *T. Fortunei* should be planted at least 6 feet (1.6m) away from pathways and buildings (further if there is an overhang), and *T. Wagnerianus* should be planted at least 4 feet (1.2m) away.

Height Considerations:

The growth rate of a *T. Fortunei* or *T. Wagnerianus*, once established is one foot (0.3m) per year, or more. The palms can go from an under-storey plant to a dominant plant in a relatively short timeframe.



The picture to the left shows a grouping of palms at a house in Richmond, BC. The palms were all planted as 1-gallon plants 12-14 years prior to this photo. The palms started out small and became a bit too big for their locations. Once the palms grew enough and the lower fronds were removed it became easier to walk around the car and get through the gate.

Try to imagine the palms in five-ten years time, when they are five to ten feet higher and contemplate where the shadows will fall throughout the day. Try to imagine also what outlooks and views they will block as well as how they will provide privacy and a wonderful tropical landscape. Your

choices of companion plants for the palms will determine the feel of the property, whether Mediterranean, Jungle, or a more traditional Victorian/English garden.

Planting:

The *T. Fortunei* and *T. Wagnerianus* palms will thrive in a wide range of soil types, PH levels, and amounts of sunlight. They can be planted in full sun, part shade or heavy shade.

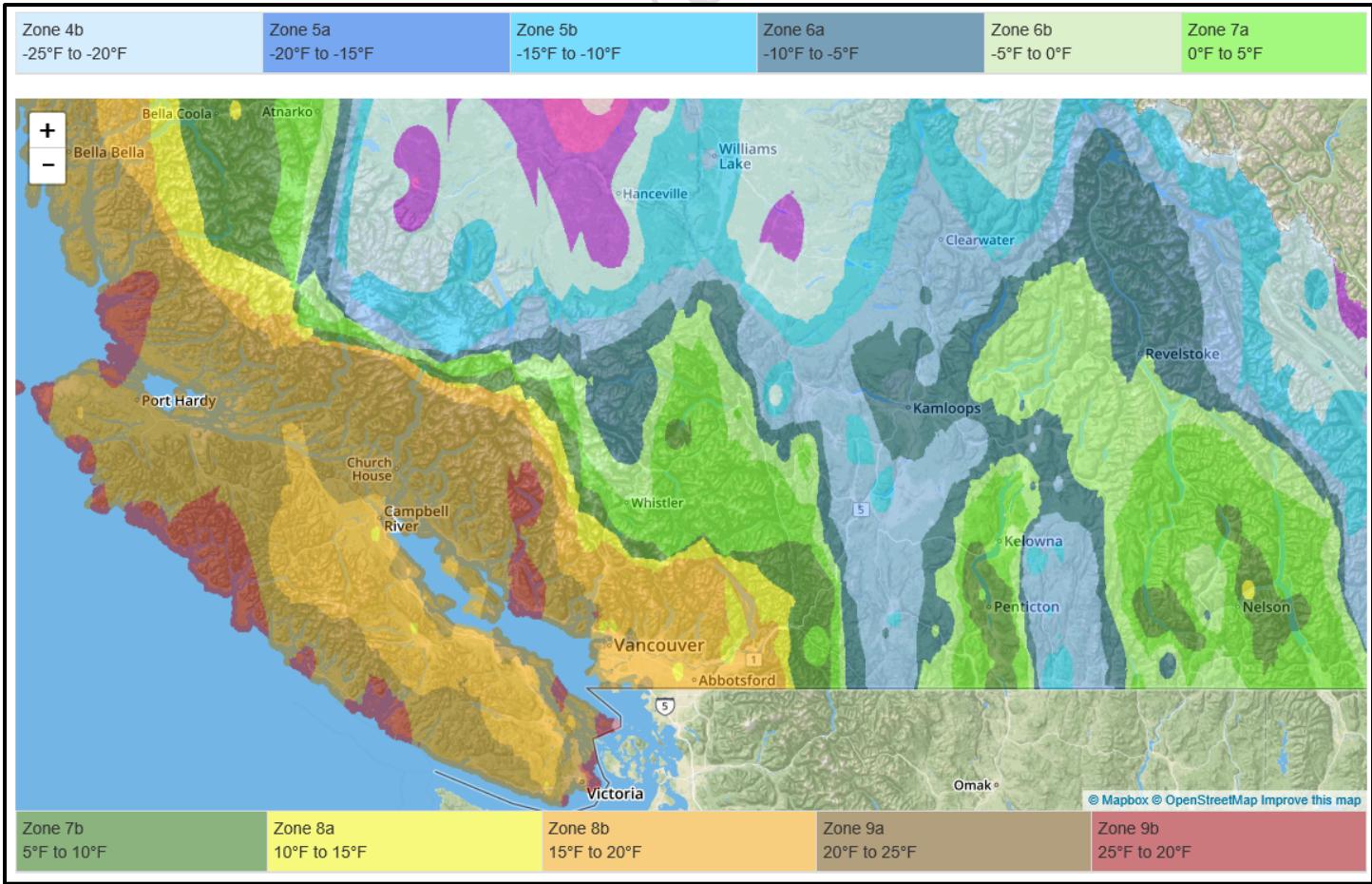
When planting the palm dig a hole that is twice as wide and deep as the pot, and improve the soil with well rotted compost, manure, and/or a slow-growth fertilizer. The care in improving the soil and choosing a good location will give the palm a good start. Plant the palm at the same level as the it was grown in the pot. Mulch around the plant to help retain moisture and to increase the insulation of the roots from extremes of temperature. Palms do very well in conditions that are also good for Rhododendrons.

Palms will grow from full-sun to partial shade. Palms planted in heavy shade will have longer fronds and petioles than those from palms grown in full sun.

Cold Hardiness:

The *Trachycarpus* palms are hardy to -12°C, allowing them to be planted without any protection in any Zone 8 or higher location. The palms will grow with very minimal protection in Zone 7b (-15°C). Provide palms some winter protection, such as a favourable microclimate on a property, add mulch around the plant and protect from the worst of the winter winds. Following these steps has allowed these palms to grow successfully in Zone 7a, and even Zone 6 with much more intensive protection.

The B.C. Hardiness Zone map shows that these palms will grow on the majority of Vancouver Island, the Lower Mainland, Sunshine Coast, and in pockets of the interior, including Penticton and close to Nelson.



Fertilizing:

The palms should be fertilized in the growing season with a slow-release fertilizer such as Osmocote Plus 15-9-12. In the Pacific Northwest, the slow-release fertilizer is applied March 21, June 15, and August 15. Avoid fertilizing after mid-August.

Watering:

The palms become more drought resistant with age and size, but will grow best with medium water, including weekly watering during the summer months.

Growth Rate:

Palms start relatively slowly, and the rate of growth increases with the size of the plant. Palms grow faster in the ground than in a pot. Once established, a mature *Trachycarpus* Palm can grow one foot, or more, per year. Palms that I have grown have increased from a 1-gallon palm to being eight feet tall in 7 years, and 14 feet tall after 14 years.

For more information about palms and other tropicals, see our website: www.cherrypointpalms.ca

Happy palm growing!

Steven Read