

Mediterranean Fan Palm

Chameorops humilis

The Mediterranean fan palm is the only native European species. It is found wild in southwest Europe (Spain, Italy & Sardinia) and also northwest Africa (Morocco, Algeria & Tunisia). The palm is also known as the European dwarf palm.



It is a shrub-like palm, with several stems growing from a single fibrous base. In the wild the plant can grow to about 8 metres high, whereas in the garden or in pots they rarely grow higher than 4 metres. Each leaf has a long stalk ending with 10-20 leaflets that form the fan shape. The leaf stalk has needle sharp spikes, which act as a natural defense against destruction by animals.

They should be handled with care and if grown in a garden placed out of the reach of small children.

It is one of the hardier palms, tolerating winter frosts down to about -12 degrees, although it does require hot summers for good growth. This allows gardeners in colder climates to give their garden a Mediterranean look. Young plants should be grown in pots and moved to sheltered spots during the colder times.

In the wild this palm is found in a variety of habitats: in forests, between bushes, on rocky slopes or barren wastelands. They prefer a calcareous soil with a ph of about 7.5 for successful, healthy plants, which should be borne in mind when planting in the garden or a pot. As the plant grows it produces a strong and deep root system so that it can search for moisture in drought conditions.

Flowering occurs from late April to early June on plants as young as 6 years. The flowers appear in short clusters at the top of the stem and the plant is dioecious, being either male or female and both type of plant are needed in close proximity for wind pollination and reproduction. The berries, which have an unpleasant smell, will first be green, changing to yellowish pink and then a darker reddish brown.