

Our February program, “Designing With Palms for Dry climates,” was presented by Jason Dewees, the horticulturist and palm expert at Flora Grubb Gardens in San Francisco, and East West Trees in Fallbrook. He shared that it was his experience that nursery customers often don’t know what to do with palms, and he wanted to address

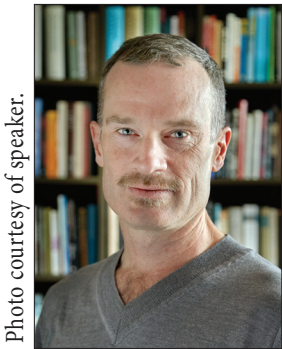


Photo courtesy of speaker.

this lack of information in his recently published book “*Designing with Palms.*” Photos taken for the book by Caitlin Atkinson, of unexpected and creative uses of

palms from visits to over 70 gardens, were included in his slide presentation.

By way of introduction to the *Arecaceae* family, Jason began by telling us that after grasses and legumes, the palms make up the third most useful plant family globally, especially in areas where they are found indigenously. They are also known to be one of the earliest cultivated trees in civilization. While they are typically thought of as a “tropical” plant, he stressed that with over 800 genera and 2,500 species, palms can easily be adapted to more diverse landscaping applications. If selected for color, size, shape and height, they can be successfully integrated into a variety of design styles, as his presentation illustrated.

We were shown beautiful pictures from the Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden in Coral Gables, Florida, where palms are used extensively for dramatic effect. Also in Florida, Jason shared images of the

Brazilian Garden created by landscape designer Raymond Jungles (a student of Roberto Burle Marx), located inside the Naples Botanical Garden. There, palms blended seamlessly with a mixture of native Brazilian plants, for an entirely different effect than at Fairchild. In still another application, landscape architect Steve Martino combined *Washingtonia filifera* with yucca and a variety of succulents for a dramatic desert-themed residential garden in Palm Springs.

Jason went on to explain some basic design principles to consider when using palms, specifically that their habit will change as they go through growth phases while maturing. When they are young, many palms go through a “rosette” phase before developing a trunk, at which time they can tuck nicely into a mixed bed. At

maturity, they are better suited as design elements to anchor a planting scheme, or for dramatic effect. They can also be used as a vertical element to create the illusion of more space in a small area, by drawing the eye upward. He showed a staircase at the Virginia Robinson Gardens in Los Angeles, flanked by palm trunks, and a grouping of potted palms on a small patio in San Francisco as further examples of the versatility of palms. He then went on to give examples of palms used in a variety of design styles which can be found in gardens throughout California.

Trachycarpus fortunei is commonly used in Japanese gardens, including the San Francisco Botanical Garden, while *Jubaea chilensis* can be seen rising

above California native plants at the Ruth Bancroft Garden in Walnut Creek. A *Brahea* is used in combination with grasses to create a savannah-like look at the Huntington Library’s entrance in San Marino, while a variety of palms are used in the “Blue Garden” at LotusLand in Santa Barbara, selected primarily for their color. The multi-trunked *Dypsis baronii* (example in photo below) is often used to evoke a coastal or an island feeling.

After the slide show concluded, Jason answered questions from the audience, including which palms are well-suited to Southern California (*Chamaerops humilis*, which can get by on very little irrigation, *Washingtonia robusta*, and *Syagrus romanzoffianum* were a few). He mentioned that Flora Grubb is no longer growing *Phoenix canariensis* because it

is under attack by a disease which can spread to other trees. He also shared that when transferring potted palms into the ground, it is very important to minimize root disturbance and to cover all visible roots with a layer of mulch.

Unfortunately, due to the recent rains which flooded the Fallbrook nursery, Jason was unable to bring any copies of his book for purchase, but it is readily available online through Amazon. We did, however, have plant sales from several vendors going on, and had a good showing of members’ plants at our monthly Plant Forum, seemingly indicating everyone’s eagerness to get back to gardening as soon as there is a break in the winter rains!

🌿 Sabine Steinmetz



Photo credit: Sabine Steinmetz

SHARING SECRETS

Our seasonally-themed gardening question for February was:

Do you have any favorite books or internet resources to recommend for advice on winter tree-pruning?



Whether the rainy weather kept everyone from getting to their pruning, or even thinking about it, we don’t know, but we did not get any responses! So we’re giving you a few tried and true resources to get you started...

🌿 **How to Prune Fruit Trees**
by R. Sanford Martin

Originally published in 1944, this is still a “must have” in every gardener’s library, and is still available in stores and online.

🌿 **Prune Mature Trees Properly**
from UC Davis - link below:

<http://ucce.ucdavis.edu/files/filelibrary/5253/16799.pdf>

Of course, you can find any number of resources online, but it can be difficult to weed out misleading information from sound advice. For the health of your trees and the best care, check with a certified or consulting arborist.