

Author's Note: This is the [enter number] in a series of articles by members of the City of Sanibel Vegetation Committee dealing with vegetative matters of concern to island residents. Members of the Vegetation Committee are Sanibel residents appointed by City Council for one-year terms. To be considered for appointment, contact the City Manager's Office at (239) 472-3700.

Ditch the Exotic, Plant the Authentic!

Sanibel's beaches are legendary, but did you know our island paradise thrives thanks to native plants, especially our majestic palms? Imagine your place – a haven for wildlife, a conversation starter with neighbors, and a tropical oasis you helped create.

Why choose native palms for your tropical paradise?

Hurricane Heroes: Native palms are built tough, weathering storms that might topple less-adapted trees.

Wildlife Welcome Wagon: Our butterflies, birds, and critters rely on native plants for food and shelter. Many non-native plants do not support our wildlife in this way and can interfere with our native plant communities.

Low-Maintenance Legends: Forget fussy fertilizers! Native palms thrive with minimal care, leaving you more time for beach strolls.

Our native habitats are found only in our part of the world and nowhere else on earth. It is unique as well as beautiful and we can do our part in preserving it. Visit your local nursery or the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation's, Native Landscapes & Garden Center and ask for any of the native species listed here.

Buccaneer Palm (*Pseudophoenix sargentii*)

The smooth old leaf bases and blue/green foliage give this palm an elegant tropical look. Good salt and wind tolerance make this a good choice for somewhat sheltered coastal settings. This species is endangered in Florida so make sure to acquire them through reputable nurseries. Use only local (Florida) stock to maintain the genetic integrity of the species.

Commented [HM1]: My sense is that they are quite slow growing. Is that worth mentioning?

Cabbage Palm (*Sabal palmetto*)

The official state tree of Florida, this palm is tolerant of occasional/brief inundation, such as can occur in storm surges; and moderately tolerant of salty wind. Their dead palm fronds provide habitat for native wildlife, including Eastern Screech Owl and yellow bats who love to eat mosquitos, and other insects. More information about how to best care for the Cabbage Palm is at [https://www.mysanibel.com/content/download/29376/file/Article 4 - Cabbage Palm pruning.pdf](https://www.mysanibel.com/content/download/29376/file/Article%204%20-%20Cabbage%20Palm%20pruning.pdf).

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Everglades Palm/Paurotis Palm (*Acoelorrhaphe wrightii*)

This palm grows in clusters and has large fan-shaped fronds. It can tolerate wet conditions and prefers full sun. In the spring this palm produces large inflorescences of creamy white flowers that extend well beyond the foliage. These are followed in the summer by small round fruits that pass through green and orange stages, turning black when completely ripe.

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Florida Thatch Palm (*Thrinax radiata*)

The leaves of this palm are 2-3 feet across that gives this palm a distinctive round, compact form. It's slow-growing, salt-tolerant and can withstand harsh conditions, a plus for beach-side locations.

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Key Thatch Palm (*Leucothrinax morrisii*)

Fan-shaped leaves are about 3 feet across and have silvery undersides. It's slow-growing and listed as Endangered by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. This palm can tolerate significant and ongoing amounts of salty wind and salt spray without injury, a plus for beach-side locations.

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Royal Palm (*Roystonea regia*)

This palm grows well in wet soils. It is considered a self-cleaning palm because its naturally dying old leaves cleanly drop off by themselves, at a rate of about one leaf per month. But these old fronds can be extremely

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heavy and can injure people and damage property when they fall. Make sure to plant this palm in an area far from walkways and buildings.

Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*)

This low and slow-growing, multi-trunked shrubby palm is well-suited for coastal environments. It can be found with both silvery and green foliage and has saw-toothed leaf edges and produces small black fruits that attract birds. This native plant tolerates a range of conditions and provides wonderful textural interest beneath new or established trees. And it's highly salt-tolerant, making it ideal for coastal gardening.

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Planting native palms benefits the ecosystem by providing habitat for wildlife, supporting natural food webs, and helping to prevent soil erosion. They're also beautiful and low-maintenance additions to any Sanibel landscape. In addition, many of our native plants proved to be quite resilient after hurricane Ian. The Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation's "Post Hurricane-Ian Replanting Guide" lists the palms that survived hurricane Ian, among other plants that withstood the storm surge of 5-plus feet, https://issuu.com/sccf3/docs/sccf_replanting_guide-final.

Where can I learn more about native plants on Sanibel? The Vegetation Committee hosts free guided plant walks from November to April at City Hall to view and discuss the use of native plants. Everyone and their questions are welcome!

Go native with the right help!

To read other Vegetation Committee articles in this series please visit the City of Sanibel's Natural Resources Department website: <https://www.mysanibel.com/government/natural-resources>.

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