

# FGCU Food Forest

## Plant Database

### Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*)

**Origin:** Eastern coastal plains of the

**Description:** Saw palmetto is a small hardy fan palm whose stem usually remains below ground or runs just along the surface.

**Uses:** Ornamental landscaping and

**Harvest:** Berries mature in early fall and persist into the winter.

**Flower:** Small white flowers occurring on large (several feet), branched

**Tolerance:** Saw palmetto usually grows on dry, very well-drained soils,

drained river terraces. Preferred soils

content. Saw palmetto may also grow on peaty and poorly drained sites.

temperatures range from 97 to 25 degrees F.



**General Description:** Saw palmetto is a small hardy fan palm whose stem usually remains below ground or runs just along the surface. In some cases, it develops an erect or arching trunk that may lift the whorl of leaves 2-8 ft above ground. The palmate leaves are 2-3 ft across and green or bluish green. The cluster of leaves gets about 4-6 ft high with a similar spread. In the wild, saw palmetto often grows in clumps 20 ft or more in diameter. The petioles (leaf stems) are about 2 ft (0.6 m) long and sharply saw-toothed.

The fruits are round, black when ripe and about an inch in diameter.

- **Native Origin:** It is endemic to the southeastern United States, most commonly along the Atlantic and Gulf Coastal plains, but also as far inland as southern Arkansas.
- **General History:** Saw palmetto berries have been used in American folk medicine for several hundred years as an aphrodisiac and for treating prostate problems. Native Americans in the southeast United States have used saw palmetto since the 1700s to treat male urinary problems. In the 1800s, medical botanist John Lloyd noted that animals that ate saw palmetto appeared healthier and fatter than other livestock. Early American settlers noticed the same effects and used the juice from saw palmetto berries to gain weight, to improve general disposition, as a sedative, and to promote reproductive health. In the United States, the medicinal uses of saw palmetto were first documented in 1879 by Dr. J. B. Read, a physician in Savannah, Georgia, who published a paper on the medicinal benefits of the herb in the April 1879 issue of *American Journal of Pharmacy*. A pungent tea made from saw palmetto berries was commonly used in the early 1900s to treat prostate enlargement and urinary tract infections. It was also used in men to increase sperm production and sex drive, although these uses are discounted today.
- **Distribution:** Saw palmetto, *Serenoa repens*, occurs naturally on the coastal plain from South Carolina to southeastern Louisiana. It grows in a wide range of habitats from seaside sand dunes and dry scrub to moist forests, pine flatwoods and even wetlands. Saw palmetto can be the dominant ground cover in certain southeastern pine forests, sometimes covering hundreds of acres.
- **Season of Harvest:** Saw Palmettos are long-living perennial plants. Flowers appear in early summer and the fruit matures in early fall and persists into the winter.
- **Uses:** Saw-palmetto stems provide crude logs and have been used for pulp, although the quality of the paper produced is poor. Saw-palmetto helps provide primary habitat for the wildlife of southern Florida's palmetto prairies. It can also be used for watershed protection, erosion control, and phosphate-mine reclamation. A drug called serenoa can be derived from the partially dried, ripe fruits of saw-palmetto and used to treat bladder, prostate, and urethra infections. Bees collect nectar from the flowers to produce honey. Saw-palmetto leaves provide thatch and Christmas decorations. Saw palmetto stems are a source of tannin acid extract and can be processed into a cork substitute

Saw Palmetto	
Scientific Classification	
Kingdom:	Plantae
(unranked):	Angiosperms
(unranked):	Monocots
(unranked):	Commelinids

Order:	Arecales
Family:	Arecaceae
Genus:	<i>Serenoa</i>
Species:	<b><i>S. repens</i></b>

### **Sources**

<http://fnps.org/plants/plant/serenoa-repens>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serenoa>

<http://mobile.floridata.com/Plants/Arecacea/Serenoa%20repens/244>

<http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/shrub/serrep/all.html#MANAGEMENTCONSIDERATIONS>

<http://dendro.cnre.vt.edu/dendrology/syllabus/factsheet.cfm?ID=355>

[http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Saw\\_palmetto.aspx](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Saw_palmetto.aspx)

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