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Chamaerops - Growing Guide

Growing Chamaerops Humilis

Commonly known as ‘Dwarf Fan Palms’

This is a genus of only one species and the only member of the palm family which is native to Europe (western Mediterranean). It should not be confused with trachycarpus or fan palms which are, sadly, rather hardier in much of the UK than C. humilis.

That is not to say that this palm is not perfectly hardy at Kew or in urban gardens as well as all along the south coast wherever palms thrive in seaside locations.

C. humilis, the ‘Bushy Palm’, is an evergreen shrub forming a dense cluster of growths close to the ground and exhibiting hemispheres of dense foliage. It produces, in maturity, a small stemmed trunk covered with fan shaped leaves which are blue-grey and 2-3ft long with 12 to 15 leaflets.

These plants make a spectacular architectural feature as they grow and develop into a mass of stems. This effect can be readily enjoyed in a large pot in a cool greenhouse or on the patio in colder counties.

The flowers, in mature plants, are yellow in dense panicles of about 2ft in length. They are often hidden within the foliage rather than being the feature that they are in Trachycarpus fortunei.

The ultimate height of this palm after 50 years or so might be 6-10ft with a similar spread. It will however, by then, be the centre of a large clump of varying sizes. More realistically for most of us, it will remain as a dense low clump. You often see these plants grown under or beside T. fortunei. The contrast is striking.

The plant grows best in hot, dry, sunny situations. It will tolerate poor soil. In the greenhouse it needs a loam based potting compost and plenty of liquid feed in summer. Water sparingly in winter.

The easiest way to propagate this plant is to cut off the side suckers from the main plant in spring. Even small plants in pots will produce plenty of side shoots.


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