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Phoenix - Growing Guide

Growing Phoenix Canariensis

Canary Island Date Palm

The Canary Island palm is perhaps best known as a house plant which can often be found on supermarket shelves as a small ornamental plant with attractive packaging. This rather belies the reality of how widely this plant can be grown to maturity outside in the UK. One might perhaps expect to see it growing as a huge avenue at Ventnor Botanic Gardens or on Tresco but Phoenix canariensis is now well established on several Cornish roundabouts near Falmouth and fine specimens are growing in many gardens along the south coast seaside belt. Certainly they took a battering during the March 2018 ‘Beast’ but most have survived perfectly well with shelter from the cold winds and some blackening of some older fronds which they can readily grow through. The older and larger they get the more cold they can withstand.

We have grown this palm for decades in unheated polytunnels on the nursery. Yes, we have lost younger plants in the garden in severe frost and, yes, this plant is not quite as tough as other palms such as Trachycarpus fortunei or Chamaerops humilis but, in milder areas, you should certainly consider planting it outside when it outgrows its location in the greenhouse as it soon will.

Phoenix canariensis has broad spreading, arching leaf fronds with deep green leaflets. In ideal situations it will eventually (25 years plus) develop a columnar trunk with oblong leaf scars. Only when the trunk develops might you expect it to flower. The flowers are borne (like most palms) in huge pendant panicles of cream to yellow flowers. The fruits are rounded, edible and sweet; yellow flushed red when ripe.

While you are unlikely to see your P. canariensis grow into the huge plants seen at Ventnor or Tresco that is not to say that, in the right part of the country and in the right position, you should not risk this palm outside. On holiday in the Mediterranean you will have seen this plant many times and with global warming why not take a risk after the 2018 drought summer!

A hot, dry, fertile, moist but well drained soil is needed in full sun and with wind protection.


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