

**Palm Trees  
A Story in Photographs**

**By David Leaser**

**Westwood Pacific Publishing**

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color illus.**

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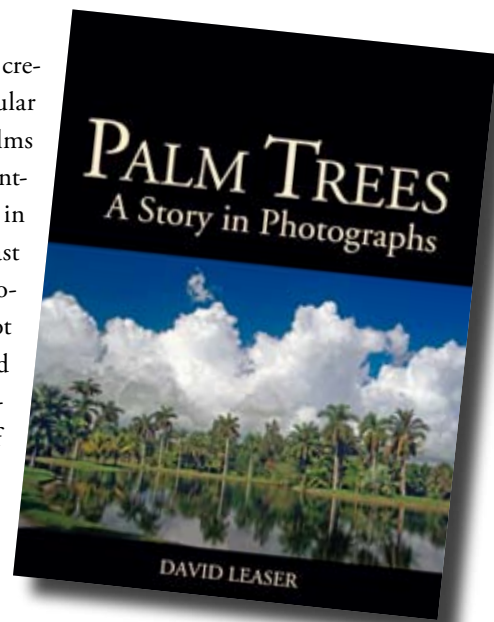
For decades, the best encyclopedic, accessible book on palms in English was *Palms of the World*, by Joseph McCurrach, long out of print but occasionally available used. Published in Florida in 1960 and reprinted in 1970, it is an extraordinary document of late-Eisenhower-era (and pre-Castro) Sunshine State horticulture, with beautiful black-and-white photographs, a format organized by genus, and as much information as one could hope to assemble in 60-plus years of palm horticulture in Florida, Southern California, and the Caribbean. The least-informative entries, as for cool-growing genera like *Rhopalostylis* and *Ceroxylon*, were romantic temptations, while entries for common Florida subjects, like *Roystonea* and *Sabal*, gratified with detail, and portraits of genera subject to the Lethal Yellowing disease that swept Florida in the 1970s, like *Pritchardia* and *Cocos*, recorded lost splendor. Then, in the 1980s, a stream of books from Australia, these with color photos and cultural notes more legible to Californians, began to appear, and to reveal the contours of potential palm introductions for our

West Coast climates. Beautiful as some of their photos were, the books were rightly dedicated to the horticulture and botany of palms.

Now, Southern California resident and International Palm Society member



David Leaser has created a spectacular portfolio of palms for the frequent-flyer age. Printed in vivid, high-contrast color, the photographs he has shot and assembled capture the aesthetic power of this beautiful yet workhorse family of plants.



The book opens with basic information about the group, its history, economic importance, and its iconic species – the coconut (*Cocos nucifera*) – and then tours the world by way of regional palm species and the gardens and habitats in which they grow.

The balance of information and beauty provides perfect leisure reading, whether to learn more about the plants, or simply to be transported to tropical beaches in the New and Old Worlds, Moroccan cityscapes, California idylls, or botanical gardens in Hawaii, Florida, California, the Caribbean, and beyond. Among the particular achievements of the book is capturing the setting of Ho'omaluhia Botanical Garden, at the base of the green, knife-edged Ko'olau Mountains on windward O'ahu. A massive flood-control project-cum-botanical garden, vast Ho'omaluhia offers exquisitely grown, rare palms against a titanic backdrop. As with so many of the settings, the book makes a good case for touring the place. By the same token, Leaser's spreading prints render the flat setting of Florida *Sabal palmetto* habitat serene and colorful, and preserve the messy vigor of Palm Springs' *Washingtonia filifera* groves in Palm Canyon.

In the vein of touring, the book peeks at humans and their uses for palms beyond horticulture as well, offering respites from greenery in photos of people, handiwork and architecture. It is a delight to see such a lavish and seductive photo book given over to one plant family, especially one's favorite.

The few minor errors of nomenclature will have no effect on the reader's enjoyment of this distillation of arecaceous beauty. *Palm Trees: A Story in Photographs* introduces readers to a fascinating group, and offers the next best thing to an intoxicating walk through Fairchild Tropical Garden in Miami.