



SPOTLIGHT ON

# Seven Surprising Uses for Palms

**A**round the world, entire communities rely on palm trees for their survival. From oil production plantations in Africa to coconut groves in Asia, the palm tree is one of the most useful plants on earth, second only to the grass family.

For more information on palm trees, visit the International Palm Society at [www.palms.org](http://www.palms.org) or write them at P.O. Box 7075, Lawrence, KS 66044.

## 1 Food and Drink

Palms are used for a variety of food items, including:

- Sugar
- Dates
- Jelly
- Palm fruit (peach palm)
- Coconut meat
- Vegetable (called pacaya)
- Candied palm flowers
- Snacks (coquitos)
- Palm hearts
- Cabbage
- Vinegar
- Toddy (from sap)
- Wine (from fruit)
- Coconut water

## 2 Shelter

An entire house can be built from a palm tree, including:

- Thatch for roof
- Lumber for structure
- Siding
- Shingles
- Pilings for piers
- Twine for weaving roofing
- Floor covering

## 3 Medicine

Palms are used for a variety of medicines and supplements, including:

- Saw palmetto for prostate
- Coconut oil
- Coconut water has been used as a blood substitute
- Narcotics (betel nut palm)

## 4 Clothing

You can dress yourself, almost completely, from items derived from palm trees, including:

- Hats
- Sandals
- Purses
- Fabric from raffia
- Buttons and jewelry from tagua (palm ivory)

## 5 Furniture

Most palm furniture is fashioned out of rattan or slender canes of the raphis palm. Rattan palms are spiny, climbing palms that grow to more than 20 feet tall. These palms are harvested, skinned and processed to create long lasting furniture that can be used indoors or outside.

## 6 Household items

Palms are used for a variety of household items, including:

- Soap
- Cosmetics
- shampoo
- Car wax
- Brooms

## 7 Money

Palms are used by millions of people around the world for commerce. Entire villages in South America rely completely on palm trees for their economic survival. The most economically important palms are:

- Oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*)
- Coconut (*Cocos nucifera*)
- Date palm (*P. dactylifera*)
- Betel nut (*Areca catechu*)
- Rattan (*Dendrocalamus*)

– David Leaser is a member of the International Palm Society and the International Plant Propagators Society.

Leaser is the author of the newly released book, "Palm Trees: A Story in Photographs," available at the San Diego Zoo and the San Diego Wild Animal Park.

