

Hurricane-Damaged Palms in the Landscape: Care after the Storm¹

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While many palm species are adapted to windstorms, a hurricane can damage even the most tolerant palms. This publication provides suggestions about what to do after a windstorm has occurred once it is safe to venture outside to care for the landscape.

It is important to understand how a palm grows. The growing point of a palm is the apical meristem, often referred to as the palm bud or palm heart. It is located at the top of the trunk, surrounded by the leaf bases. All new leaves come from this bud. If the bud is severely damaged, new leaves fail to develop, and the palm eventually dies.

Unless the palm trunk is broken or it is otherwise obvious that the bud has been damaged, there is no way to predict which palms will survive wind damage and which ones will not, as the bud is not visible or accessible for inspection. However, it is apparent after several years of hurricanes in Florida that certain palm species are more tolerant of high winds than others. The native sabal palm (*Sabal palmetto*) and royal palm (*Roystonea regia*) both tend to survive high winds, but in very different ways. While sabal palms lose very few leaves, royal palms (which have a crownshaft) shed most of their leaves.

The following are some suggestions on caring for palms after a hurricane. **The main point to note (and inform clientele) is that it will be at least 6 months (and probably longer) before it is apparent that a palm will recover.**

Recovery consists of new leaves emerging from the bud. In some cases, the new leaves will not look normal—they may be abnormally shaped and/or shorter than normal, or the leaflets or leaf segments may have necrotic (dead tissue) edges. However, over time, each successive new leaf should appear a little more normal until eventually, normal leaves appear. Again, this takes time, so patience is required. It is recommended to monitor damaged palms carefully during the next 1–2 years.

It is also important to understand that because of the storm, people are examining their landscape more closely than they probably did before the storm. Thus, they may not realize that the palms had problems (such as nutrient deficiencies—see <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep273>) prior to the storm. The challenge is to determine which problems existed before the storm (and address them accordingly) as opposed to those that developed because of the storm.

Broken Palms

If the trunk of a single-stemmed palm is broken, it should be cut at the base and removed. It will not recover. However, a clustering palm has a lateral meristem at the soil line. Thus, new stems will emerge, and the palm should recover in most cases. Cut the broken stems as close to the soil line as possible. If possible, the stumps of single-stem palms should be removed or ground up. If the stumps are left in place, they should be monitored for *Ganoderma zonatum*

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