

Fusarium Wilt of Palm Trees

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Fusarium Wilt is a serious disease of certain species of palm trees, with the ability to be spread through airborne transmission or by the use of infected pruning equipment. This disease is caused by the fungus *Fusarium oxysporum* and can affect Canary Island date palm, queen palm and Mexican fan palm. This fungus blocks the vascular system of the palm, which affects water transport in the plant. Symptoms include yellowing or dead leaflets which start on one side of the leaf blade. The disease normally starts on the lowest leaves, eventually moving upwards and killing all of the leaves and the growing tip. The internal stem tissue is stained a reddish-brown when viewed as a cross section.

The most common method of infection has been through using improperly cleaned pruning tools. There have been recent outbreaks in parts of Central Florida where infections have been caused the fungus being spread through the air, which results in many trees being infected in a single neighborhood or subdivision. The fungus also survives in the soil, so if a tree dies from this disease it should not be replaced with another susceptible palm species.

There is currently no cure or recommended treatment for palm trees infected with this fungal disease. The best defenses against this problem are sanitation and cultural controls. Palm tree pruning equipment should be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized between pruning individual palms with a 25% solution of household bleach or a 50% solution of rubbing alcohol. This means that if you pay someone to trim your palms you need to make sure that they are sanitizing their equipment.

There are other diseases that cause similar symptoms in palms, along with occasional insect pests and many nutritional deficiencies. If you have a problem with a palm or any other plant, please feel free to call or stop by our office. We offer free educational materials, trained Master Gardener volunteers and we can usually diagnose your plant problem for free.