

## Virtual Hortlandia 2020

### Oregon Palm Nursery

[www.oregonpalms.com](http://www.oregonpalms.com)

This week Joanne Fuller interviewed Jim Parsons from the Oregon Palm Nursery and edited their interview for this article.

#### *Jim, which palms can we grow in the Pacific Northwest?*

At first, it surprised me that ANY palm was hardy here. Windmill Palms (*Trachycarpus fortunei*) have become quite common in Portland, and I'm still amazed how long they can live, and how tall they can get here. I love the Waggie Palm (*Trachycarpus wagnerianus*). It comes from the same family as the Windmill Palm, but it has finer cut leaves that don't get tattered, which makes it look more graceful. Grown in a little shade, the leaves will get very green. It is much slower growing than the Windmill, so it is never going to be the one for people who want a big palm tree fast.

Of course, the Blue Mediterranean Fan Palm (*Chamaerops humilis* v. *cerifera*) is also great. The blue Mediterranean palm is far hardier than the green Mediterranean palm. The blue one grows at about 5,000 ft in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco-- so that explains the hardiness. Its finely cut very blue foliage is outstanding. It's surprising, but the Chilean Wine Palm (*Jubaea chilensis*) is also hardy here. They are one of the most coveted palms because they are so slow growing-- it takes forever for them to reach specimen height.

There is a hybrid of the Jelly Palm and the Chilean Wine Palm (*Butia capitata* x *Jubaea chilensis*) that is growing in Tom McCall Waterfront Park. It's about fifteen feet tall and clearly hardy-- very surprising.

#### *How did the Oregon Palm Nursery get started?*

I like palm trees! In the late 90's, I returned to Oregon from teaching overseas. I really missed all the tropical plants I saw in Central America. So, I bought some seeds online and started growing them in the backyard. I bought my first greenhouse, then the palm trees were overtaking me. I needed to get rid of some, so I decided to sell them. I started at the Beaverton Farmers Market, and at first, people laughed at the idea of palm trees in Oregon. I knew I could win them over, and eventually I did.

#### *How did you learn to grow palms?*

I'm completely self-taught. Yucca Do, Cistus and Plant Delights were the pioneers in hardy exotics. I learned from them, reading online and lots of trial and error. By now, I have grown so many palms from seed, when I try a new plant, I can usually figure out what it needs. After all these years, I haven't lost the passion.

#### *You sell other plants in addition to palms?*

I sell Yucca Rostrata which customers love. It looks like a short fat trunked palm tree, and it mixes well with succulents and cactus. These days, I sell lots of yuccas, hardy agaves, bamboos and bananas. A couple of my favorites are Agave montana and Agave ovatifolia. A.

montana has pointy green leaves and creates a rosette to about four feet tall and four to five feet wide. *A. ovatifolia* can grow to five feet tall and three feet wide with short wide grey-green leaves. Then there is *Agave americana* medio-picta 'Alba' which is smaller than *A. americana* but still gets to three to four feet tall and four to six feet wide. It has a bold cream stripe down the middle of each spine--I just love it. However, it really hates wet feet, so can only be grown in dry conditions with the best drainage.

### ***How do people buy plants from you?***

We sell online via the website: [www.oregonpalms.com](http://www.oregonpalms.com) and on Amazon, Instagram and Facebook. We are open weekends. I post the hours for the week on the website. And, people can call 503-201-7347 to make an appointment for weekday shopping. We have an eighty-foot commercial greenhouse and about an acre of palm trees outside, so there is plenty of room for folks to shop and social distance.

### ***Are all the palms you sell hardy for everyone?***

I try to sell palms that are proven to be hardy here. Often people want to buy a palm that won't thrive on their site--I strongly discourage them. Of course, if people want to build big warming structures around their plants every winter, then they can do that--its part of the adventure for some gardeners.

### ***What advice do you have for growing palms?***

We cannot grow plants like palm trees, hardy exotics and exotic succulents in Portland's common unamended clay soil. These plants need to be planted with cactus mix, gravel or in a berm-- they will just die if they have wet feet all winter. Also, a high percentage of people are living in housing developments where the topsoil has been removed exposing soil that really is all clay. If this type of site is going to grow these hardy exotics, the gardener must improve drainage, tith and fertility. I sell palm fertilizer. But gardeners can also use Alaskan fish fertilizer, composted wood ashes, composted chicken manure or sea kelp-- these all contain the trace elements required for healthy palms. You can use these fertilizers on other hardy exotics as well.