

Betel Nut Palm (Areca catechu)



The Betel Nut Palm is a very graceful palm with a narrow, deeply ringed trunk, growing 10-20m tall. Foliage is a beautiful deep dark green and flowers are fragrant and white. Flowers are followed by egg-size fruits of about 50mm long. Mature leaves fall off by themselves, making this a self-cleaning palm.

The fruit of this palm, the Betel nut or Areca nut, is most famous for its intoxicating effect and is often chewed throughout some Asian and Pacific countries. The nut is said to have antidepressant and euphoric properties, but is also considered slightly addictive. Nuts are also used for their medicinal qualities, and are said to cure many ailments.

Areca catechu is fairly fast growing, gaining $\frac{1}{2}$ m/year in height in best conditions. First flowers can be borne at 4 years old, and first nuts at 7 years. Full production can be reached at 10-15 years. Areca catechu can produce up to 6 bunches of fruit per year, each bunch with between 50 and 400 fruits. Annual weight averages between 2.5 -8kg per crop.

Being native to rainforest areas, it will need moist, but well draining soil. It does not like drying out. Mulch heavily if you're growing this palm in the ground, and provide plenty of rich organic matter. We recommend you keep this plant in a pot until it has produced 5 or more leaves. Plant at least 3m apart in the ground to allow for air circulation.

The Betel Nut Palm is best grown in a shaded position while young, but should be grown in full sun once it is out of the juvenile stage. This palm cannot handle cold and is best grown in the tropics or warm sub-tropics, or alternatively indoors in cooler areas. The Betel Nut is suitable for use as indoor plant.

Common names: Betel Nut Palm, Areca Palm, Areca Nut Palm, Pinang Palm

Additional General Growing Notes:

ON ARRIVAL:

Soaking: When you receive your plants, unwrap them carefully, and give their roots a good soak in seaweed solution or water for a couple of hours. Some plants, mainly succulents and plants with fleshy roots such as *Dracaena draco*, should not be soaked for more than a few minutes to avoid rot. You can pour left-over seaweed solution on the plant after you have potted it up.

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Pot size: Choose the right pot size for your plants. Don't choose a huge pot in the hope the plant will grow faster, as it won't! Most small plants will grow well in 75mm or 100mm pots, medium plants will often be suited to 125mm to 140mm pots, and large plants will need bigger pots to suit.

Potting mix: Use a well draining potting mix which is of good quality. You can mix your own, or purchase a pre-mix from garden centres. Cacti, succulents and cycads will appreciate a potting mix which is very well draining. You can add some sand, perlite or vermiculite to improve drainage, or purchase a specific cacti & succulent potting mix. Some plants, such as Gardenia & Azalea will need specific potting mix as they prefer acidic soil, and Aroids such as Orchids and Philodendron like to grow in special orchid mix.

Fertilising: All plants appreciate good, nutrient-rich soil, and will grow well with a regular application of the right fertiliser. It is best to find a fertiliser specifically designed for the type of plant you are growing. We generally use a slow release fertiliser (such as Osmocote) for most plants, and also add lots of organic matter to the soil. Plants thrive with regular application of blood & bone, Dynamic Lifter or other organic fertiliser, which adds to your soil. You can also add slow release regularly to really kick them on. Some foliage plants will love a regular feed with liquid fertiliser, as it is both absorbed through the foliage, and the soil. Cacti and succulents need special care when it comes to fertilisers as they can be very sensitive. Use a diluted form of liquid fertiliser or organic fertiliser only.

Watering: Make sure you water in your plants really, really well! You need to get air bubbles out of the soil, as roots die when they come into contact with air bubbles. This might cause them to die back, prohibits them from thriving and might even cause death. It is one of the most important things to do when re-potting plants! Once watered in, water your plants regularly. The rate would depend on the pot size. Most leafy plants will give you an indication of when they need watering, but it's best to not let it get that far. You can stick your finger in the soil to check, the soil should feel moist to your second knuckle. If it feels dry, water. It is best to water when the plant needs it, and water well, rather than watering small amounts. This will stop the roots from developing properly. Make sure you don't overwater to avoid root rot and cloggy soil. Cacti and succulents don't need as much water. Most plants need less water during winter. Pots will need more watering than plants in the ground.

Position: It's best to keep your plants in a protected position away from heat, sun, draughts etc. until you see some new growth, such as a new shoot or leaf. Once they have accustomed to their new climate and environment, you can start adjusting them to their final position in the garden, or pot. Slowly adjust them to full sun, and keep them protected from frost and wind for as long as possible. Some plants, such as *Dracaena draco*, Cycads, Cacti and most Succulents can be placed in a sunny position right from when they are young. Growing plants up in pots until they're nice and strong will ensure a good start in the garden, so we recommend growing them in pots for a while first. If you are planting them out, 'tree guard' are a good thing, and so are structures around the plant with shade cloth. Make sure you mulch well when you plant them in the garden – mulch conditions your soil, protects roots and saves water!

Research

As there are many aspects to growing plants, such as climate, position and care, we recommend you read as much as possible about your plant. The internet is a great source of information, as our online forums and books. Some plants may have special needs in your climate, and our guide is only provided as general information and reflects our own experience. We do not accept any responsibility for consequences of the usage of the information provided in this guide.

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