

## Travellers Palm (*Ravenala madagascariensis*)



A beautiful tree from the Bird of Paradise (*Strelitzia*) family which produces big banana-like foliage. Foliage arranges itself in a fan-shaped form. Though technically not a palm tree, it is often called one because of the short palm-like trunk & foliage.

It produces white flowers, followed by brown fruits and derives its name from the fact that it collects and holds rainwater in its leaf folds and flower bracts. Thirsty travellers knew to seek out this tree to collect water. Seeds are a wonderful blue colour.

This is a stunning tropical plant and would act well as a feature plant, or as back drop for other tropical plants. It is often used to line driveways and property entries, for which the fan shape lends itself very well.

Ravenala is best grown in full sun to part shade, in moist but well draining soil. Although it is adaptable to soil type, it grows best in a soil which is rich in nutrient, so add lots of organic matter. Fertilise regularly with a high-nitrogen slow release fertiliser, or use a liquid fertiliser every month or as instructed on the packaging. Mulch well to keep moisture in

the ground where it is needed.

The Travellers Palm is said to handle temperatures to 0 °C, but cannot handle full frost. It can be grown indoors or in a green house in cooler climates. It grows well in containers and could be moved to a protected spot when frost is likely to appear, before returning to a warm outdoor spot.

The Travellers Palm can be propagated from seed, or offsets which pop up at the base of the tree. Offsets can be allowed to grow, producing a more 'shrub-like' tree, or removed and replanted elsewhere.

**Common names** : Travelers Palm, Travellers Palm, Travellers Tree.

### **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.

## National Tropical Plants

312 Mineral Rd, Rosedale Q 4674, Australia

Telephone: 0741565308 | Fax: 0741455303

<http://www.nationaltropicals.com.au>