

The Palms of Victoria Avenue

Few plants initiate thoughts of a warm, tropical paradise like images of palms. Palms belong to a natural group or family of plants known as the *Arecaceae* (formally *Palmae*). The family is distributed throughout the tropical and subtropical areas of the world. The palm family is large (approximately 200 genera and 2600 species) and of great economic importance. Palms are long-lived monocotyledonous plants (related to grasses, lilies and orchids) with a characteristic appearance that enables most people to recognize them with little trouble. Palms generally have a distinct “woody” trunk, are unbranched or tufted, have a terminal cluster of tightly packed, complex leaves and bear many, inconspicuous flowers on complex stalks or inflorescences. There are two major leaf forms: palmate (fan-shaped) or pinnate (feather-shaped).

Victoria Avenue is known for its long rows of old and stately palms. In fact, there are over 1600 individual palms growing at regularly spaced intervals along the Avenue. Although the number of plants is large, the number of species is low, many four. The species of palms present in Riverside come from locally wet areas in dry regions of the world and are very hardy. They tolerate seasonal dry spells and occasional frosts. Therefore, these four species are well adapted to Riverside’s climate. The species present are also quite distinctive and easy to identify.

California and Mexican Fan Palms (*Washingtonia filifera* and *W. robusta*) These two closely related species have fan-shaped leaves and are native to the deserts of California, Arizona and Baja California. They were named in honor of our first President, George Washington. The California fan palm is the only palm species native to California, where it is found naturally in desert canyons and washes adjacent to fault lines that capture surface or underground water. It has larger leaves and wider trunks than its close relative, the Mexican Fan Palm which is taller and has narrower trunks. The majority of palms in the median strips are Mexican Fan Palms. One of these was planted in 1903 at Myrtle Street during President Teddy Roosevelt’s visit to Riverside and is designated by a plaque on a pedestal at its base. Significant stands of California Fan Palms exist between Laramie and Anna, and between Washington and Madison on the outgoing side of Victoria Avenue. The California and Mexican Fan Palms freely hy-

brize and many fan palms around town have intermediate characteristics indicating their hybrid nature.

Canary Island Date Palm (*Phoenix canariensis*) The Phoenix palms are native to the old world from Africa through the Middle East and to Southeast Asia. Individual trees are either male or female and bear only unisexual flowers. The Canary Island Date Palm is the largest, single-trunked species in the genus. Older specimens are magnificent in their size, 60 ft tall and a 50 ft spread due to the great head of deep-green, gracefully arching feather-shaped leaves. Flowering stalks and mature fruits on female trees are brightly orange-colored. Significant stands of Canary Island Date Palm are growing between Central and Apple Orchard and between Maude and Jane on the outbound side of Victoria Avenue.



Picture above: Canary Island Date Palm (*Phoenix canariensis*) alternating with Mexican Fan Palm (*Washingtonia robusta*).

Guadalupe Palm (*Brahea edulis*) The genus *Brahea* consists of 16 hardy species distributed in open, rocky outcrops of Baja California, Mexico and Central America. Native to Guadalupe Island, of the western coast of Baja, this palms species has fleshy, edible fruit, hence the name *edulis*. Mature specimens are large and handsome with a stout trunk and a large head of heavy, fan-shaped leaves. There are about 30 Guadalupe Palms planted on Victoria Avenue. Look for them between Horace and Maude and between Van Buren and Myers on the outbound side of Victoria Avenue.

Other palm species that are well adapted to Riverside's climate are: Pygmy Date Palm (*Phoenix roebelinei*), King Palm (*Archontophoenix cunninghamiana*), Pindo Palm (*Butia capitata*), Mediteranean Fan Palm (*Chamaerops humilis*), Mexicn Blue Palm (*Brahea armata*) and Queen Palm (*Syagrus romanzooffiana*).

Pictured below: California Fan Palm (*Washingtonia filifera*) on right and Guadalupe Palm (*Brahea edulis*) on left. These two pictures are not photographed to scale.

