

SFA

Seeds for Africa

Pygmy Date Palm

Purchase date palm seeds or some whole dates at the local grocery store. If you buy whole dates, take off as much of the meat off the seed as you can. Then soak the seeds for 48 hours in a bowl of water. Change the water two or three times and pick the rest of meat off with a pair of tweezers. The meat on the seed will cause mould if not picked off.

Place vermiculite in a sandwich-sized plastic dish that has a lid. Mix in 2 tsp. of water and the seeds. Place the lid on the dish and put it in a warm place in your home. Some warm places may be over your stove, over a water heater or near a heater boiler.

Check the seeds every two or three days. If the vermiculite gets completely dry, add a few drops of water. Watch for the seeds to sprout.

Place sprouted seeds in a small flower pot full of compost, just under the surface. Water them enough to dampen soil, but don't over water. Keep warm and damp and you will see a leaf start to grow from the soil.

Transplant into a larger pot by putting a layer of stones and filling the rest of the pot with well-draining soil. Dig a hole in the centre and place the entire contents of the small pot in the hole. Place the pot in a sunny place. Transplant outside when the plant is about 4 feet tall.

Decide on a place in your yard to plant the seedling tree. It will need full sun and it will grow up to 100 feet, so it will need plenty of space. Plant the tree outside when it is warm both day and night.

Plant the tree by digging a hole larger than the pot. Line the hole with compost and place all the dirt and tree from its pot into the hole. Fertilize with fertilizer made for fruit trees or manure. If using manure, don't let it touch the trunk of a very young tree.

Water when the soil feels dry. As the tree gets larger, water every week to every other week in summer, but water longer. It will only need to be watered every 20 to 30 days the rest of the year.

PLANTING A PYGMY DATE PALM OUTDOORS:

Choose an area to plant your pygmy date palm where it will receive some protection from the wind. An area that is close to a wall or underneath a tree will give the palm some protection. Pygmy date palms thrive in both shade and full sun. Remember that the palm will have a spread of approximately 5 feet in width, so take this into consideration when digging your hole.

Clear any weeds or grass from the area where the pygmy date palm will be planted. Leave at least a foot around the whole palm tree, free of grass or weeds. This will help the fertilizer seep into the soil and allow the palm to grow unrestricted.

Dig out an area that is twice as big and deep as the container that is housing the pygmy date palm. With the rake, loosen up the surrounding soil.

Add manure to the hole and mix it in with the existing soil. Don't add any fertilizer to the soil as you mix it unless it's a time released fertilizer such as Osmocote granules. You don't want to burn the roots while they're trying to establish themselves in the new area.

Remove your pygmy date palm from its container and place into the hole. Make sure you don't plant the palm deeper in the soil than it was in its original container. This will put a stress on the palm and it will have a harder time growing and establishing itself in its new area. Fill the dirt in around the palm and stomp in to remove any air pockets.

Water your pygmy date palm well. Pygmy date palms like water (though they don't like standing in it), and should be watered at least three times a week during hotter months. During winter, your palm will require water twice a week. If your palm is planted in the full shade, you can cut the watering schedule in half.

Fertilize your pygmy date palm quarterly with a fertilizer specific to palms. You'll be able to find palm fertilizer at your local gardening center. Pygmy date palms love fertilizer, so the more regular your fertilizing schedule is, the better your palm will grow.

PLANTING PYGMY DATE PALMS IN CONTAINERS:

Choose a container that will accommodate the palm. Since you probably won't want to keep transplanting your pygmy date palm due to its size and thorns on the fronds, select a container that will allow the tree future growing room.

Figure that a 3 gallon container will house a palm 1.5 to 2 feet high, a 7 gallon container will house a 3 to 3.5 foot palm, a 15 gallon container will house a 4 to 4.5 foot palm, and anything bigger will need a 25 gallon container. Growing a plant in a container that is too small can cause the plant to get round root and it can stop growing.

PYGMY DATE PALM THORNS:

Select an area where your pygmy date will be living. If you're dealing with a larger size palm tree, you might want to place the container where it will be staying before you put the palm tree in it. Otherwise, it might be too hard and heavy to move. Your pygmy date will do well on an outside or inside porch. It will also do well indoors in an area that gets some light.

Fill your container with a potting mix. You don't want to use straight potting soil as it does not drain well and has a tendency to puddle. Most potting mixes will have soil and sphagnum moss included in it, which will allow the medium to properly drain. You can also find potting mixes that include a time-released fertilizer. Your pygmy date will then be fed constantly over an extended period of time as the fertilizer granules break down with watering.

Leave enough room in the centre of the container and potting mix to place the palm tree. Plant the palm in the container at the same depth it was in its original container. Cover the open area with soil and pat down firmly.

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