

SAVING THE PALMETTO

by Dave Wilson

Palmetto, *Serenoa repens*, can't be bought at nurseries in containers yet, but it can be preserved on our many wooded lots. It can also be moved. I have tried and tried for many years to do this and the following method is the only one I've found successful:

First, watch for a lot in your neighborhood which is about to be bulldozed into oblivion. Now, before you go over there, fill a tall garbage can with water and add two shovelfuls of mulch material. My favorite mulch for this operation is dried oak flowers, but you can use ground-up pine needles, oak leaves, or organic peat.

Next, prepare a shallow trench about a foot deep, two feet wide, and at least three feet long. Place mulch in the bottom and add water, filling the trench a few times and thoroughly soaking the organic material.

When you have steeled yourself against the shrieking sound of the chain saws and the grinding of the front end loader and the beep of the dump truck while your neighborhood trees vanish from sight, go over to the lot and ask the operator nicely if you could have a few of the



Photo by © EGGY LIGHT

The beauty of a decades-old saw palmetto is worth the effort of saving it, or moving it.

bulldozed palmettos. Choose two with plenty of roots left on them. They should also be moist! Take them home immediately and plunge them into the water-filled can. Let them soak for at least four hours. While they're soaking, cut all the opened fronds off leaving only the central

unopened frond. Now remove the soaked and trimmed trunks and roots from the can and place them side by side in the trench with the unopened central fronds at opposite ends of your trench.

Add more organic material and a shovelful of soil from the hole. Keep adding water to moisten as you add the mulch. The mulch should completely cover the trunks and roots leaving only the unopened fronds sticking out.

Mound the soil by digging a trench around the trench to retain water. Water every day, and watch as the unopened fronds slowly expand. Keep watering until the rainy season. Once palmetto takes root, it is pretty much drought resistant. The first two years you can fertilize with liquid fertilizer.

If you want a large clump quickly, a tree service can dig you a cluster with a tree spade. It is expensive, but it works. Build your trench and mulch and water as with your rescued clump.

Hope it works for you!

(Excerpted with permission from The White Bird, Peace River Audubon's newsletter.)