

SABAL PALM, Texas palmetto (*Sabal texana*, aka *mexicana*)
Rio Grande Valley Native



Sabal Texana is an evergreen palm with larger diameter, unbranched trunk and very large fan-shaped leaves spreading around top; Height up to 50' (15 m); Diameter up to 36" (1 m). The leaves (fronds) are 36" long and very wide. The leaf is divided into several long pointed 'fingers', tough and leathery. The color shades towards a turquoise more than the lighter greens of *Washingtonia robusta* Palms. The trunk is Gray-brown (darker brown rather than the redder color of *Washingtonia* bark), rough or ridged. Persistent *unarmed* leaf stalks (also unlike those of *Washingtonia*). Flowers: Small, white, in large branched clusters to 3' (1 m) long. The fruit is 1/2-3/4" diameter, one-seeded purple-black berrylike fruits, to black when ripe, borne in large clusters. Larger in diameter than Sabal palmetto, and much larger of a crown spread up to 35'. Tolerates salty soil, constant southeast wind, storm winds, salt spray and some strong sandy winds. Native habitats are Resaca edges and flood plains in Cameron and Hidalgo Counties of Texas and Northern Mexico. Of the original Sabal Palm forest of 40,000 acres, only 2 groves (less than 100 acres) survive. A trip to see them at the Audubon Palm Grove Sanctuary southeast of Brownsville, is well worthwhile. These majestic natives are being replanted extensively in Valley Cities, after being nearly wiped out earlier in the 20th century. The Texas Sabal may flower when very young, often blooming when the trunk is small or even still underground. The Texas Sabal is self fertile with male and female flower parts on the same plant. The Texas Sabal can best be distinguished from fan leaf type of palms by its long, smooth, non-thorny petioles, and larger diameter dark brown to grey-black smooth trunk interrupted by old leaf scars. Sabal Palmetto, known locally as Florida Sabal Palm, has a much smaller diameter and redder trunk (24"-36" Sabal texana, to 12"-18" Sabal palmetto). The seeds are food for many birds, rodents and coyotes and Sabals create valuable nesting sites and habitat for many species of RGV wildlife.

Germination of ripe seeds: Place the seeds on top of a tray of germination mix, cover them with several layers of newspaper, and keep them damp until they germinate and send down a radicle. We then plant them in containers.

We strongly recommend the continuing replanting of these Rio Grande Valley desirable native palms for aesthetics and native wildlife value.