



# Trachycarpus fortunei

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*Trachycarpus fortunei*, the Chinese windmill palm, windmill palm or Chusan palm, is a palm native to central China (Hubei southwards), southern Japan (Kyushu), south to northern Myanmar and northern India, growing at altitudes of 100–2,400 m (328–7,874 ft). It is a fan palm, placed in the family Arecaceae, subfamily Coryphoideae, tribe Trachycarpeae.

## Description

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*Trachycarpus fortunei* grows to 12–20 m (40–70 ft) tall on a single stem the diameter of which is up to 15–30 centimetres (6–12 in). The trunk is very rough with the persistent leaf bases clasp the stem as layers of coarse fibrous material. It is a fan palm with the leaves with the long petiole bare except for two rows of small spines, terminating in a rounded fan of numerous leaflets; each leaf is 140–190 centimetres (55–75 in) long, with the petiole 60–100 centimetres (24–39 in) long, and the leaflets up to 90 centimetres (35 in) long. It is a somewhat variable plant, especially as regards its general appearance and some specimens are to be seen with leaf segments having straight and others having drooping tips.

The flowers are yellow (male) and greenish (female), about 2–4 millimetres across, borne in large branched panicles up to 1 metre (3 ft 3 in) long in spring; it is dioecious, with male and female flowers produced on separate trees. The fruit is a yellow to blue-black, reniform (kidney-shaped) drupe 10–12 millimetres long, ripening in mid-autumn.

Occasionally a male plant of *T. fortunei*, besides the usual spadices, produces a few other spadices carrying really hermaphroditic flowers. Completely fertile, these are almost exactly like the male flowers, but are a little larger and with the carpels well evolute, the latter about as long as the filaments, furnished with a ring of silvery hairs all round.

## Distribution

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Windmill palm is one of the hardiest palms. It tolerates cool, moist summers as well as cold winters, as it grows at much higher altitudes than other species, up to 2,400 m (7,874 ft) in the mountains of southern China. It is not the northernmost naturally occurring palm in the world, as European fan palm (*Chamaerops humilis*) grows further north in the Mediterranean.

## Uses

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*Trachycarpus fortunei* has been cultivated in China and Japan for thousands of years, for its coarse but very strong leaf sheath fibre, used for making rope, sacks, and other coarse cloth where great strength is important. The extent of this cultivation means that the exact natural range of the species is uncertain.

## Cultivation

*Trachycarpus fortunei* is cultivated as a trunking palm in gardens and parks throughout the world in warm temperate and subtropical climates. Its tolerance of cool summers and cold winters makes it highly valued by palm enthusiasts, landscape designers and gardeners. It is grown successfully in cool climates such as the UK, France, Belgium, The Netherlands, and southern Germany. In North America it can be found growing in the coastal areas of the Pacific Northwest and in the upper southern states and middle Atlantic states north to coastal New York. Normally, *Trachycarpus* does not grow well in very hot climates.

Commonly lower tolerance limits of  $-15$  to  $-20$  °C (5 to  $-4$  °F) are cited for mature plants. Young plants are less hardy, and can be damaged by only  $-8$  °C (18 °F).

The cultivar group *Trachycarpus fortunei* 'Wagnerianus' is a small-leafed semi-dwarf variant of the species selected in cultivation in China and Japan. It differs in rarely growing to more than 5 m (16 ft) tall, with leaflets less than 45 cm (18 in) long; the short stature and small leaves give it greater tolerance of wind exposure. It has often been treated as a separate species *T. wagnerianus* in popular works, but is now included within *T. fortunei*.

Individuals belonging to a similar species, *Trachycarpus takil*, have survived a very harsh winter spell in Plovdiv.

## Nomenclature

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The species was brought from Japan (Dejima) to Europe by the German physician Philipp Franz von Siebold in 1830.

The common name refers to Chusan Island (now Zhoushan Island), where Robert Fortune first saw cultivated specimens of the species. In 1849, Fortune smuggled Windmill palm plants from China to the Kew Horticultural Gardens and the Royal garden of Prince Albert of England. The Windmill Palm was later named *Trachycarpus fortunei*, after him. It was first described by Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius in 1850 in his *Historia Naturalis Palmarum* but under the illegitimate name of "*Chamaerops excelsa*".

The names *Chamaerops excelsus* and *Trachycarpus excelsus* have occasionally been misapplied to *Trachycarpus fortunei*; this is correctly a synonym of *Rhapis excelsa*, with the confusion arising due to a misunderstanding of Japanese vernacular names.



# Trachycarpus fortunei

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*Trachycarpus fortunei*, detta anche palma di Fortune, palma cinese o della Cina e anche palma di Chusan, è una pianta appartenente alla famiglia delle *Arecaceae* (sottofamiglia *Coryphoideae*), originaria dell'Asia e frequentemente coltivata in Italia come pianta ornamentale.

## Morfologia

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È una piccola palma alta in genere 4-12 m. Lo stipite è ricoperto dai resti sfilacciati delle basi fogliari.

Le foglie sono a ventaglio, composte da numerosi segmenti saldati dalla base a circa metà foglia, sono portate in cima al fusto e sono larghe 60-90 cm. I piccioli sono lunghi da 40 a 90 cm privi di uncini, caratteristica che fa distinguere subito questa palma dalla simile *Chamaerops humilis*, anch'essa molto coltivata in Italia.

I fiori maschili sono gialli, quelli femminili verdastri, hanno un diametro di 2-4 mm e sono portati su spadici ramificati lunghi anche 1 m.

I frutti sono delle drupe reniformi di colore variabile dal giallo al nero. Ogni frutto è lungo circa 10-12 mm. Le infruttescenze sono dei grappoli.

## Distribuzione e habitat

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*T. fortunei* è originaria delle montagne della Cina e della Birmania.

Da molti secoli è coltivata sia in Cina che in Giappone per ricavarne fibre tessili con cui produrre corde, sacchi e indumenti molto resistenti al logorio. Questa sua diffusione fin dall'antichità fa sì che ci siano dubbi sul suo effettivo areale d'origine.

È la palma più resistente alle basse temperature e per questo viene utilizzata nelle zone dove le altre non crescerebbero, persino in zone riparate di Scozia e Canada occidentale (Vancouver e dintorni), mentre può avere difficoltà a crescere dove il clima è troppo secco e caldo. Le piante adulte sopportano bene anche i  $-15\text{ °C}$  tollerando per brevi periodi temperature inferiori a  $-20\text{ °C}$ .

Le giovani invece possono essere danneggiate da temperature inferiori a  $-8\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

Fu introdotta in Europa nel 1844 da Robert Fortune, al quale fu dedicata.

All'interno del giardino di Villa Cipressi è la specie arborea più presente sia in gruppi che con esemplari isolati molti dei quali nati spontaneamente.