Phoenix palm

Phoenix canariensis

www.weedbusters.org.nz

Family
Arecaceae (palm)

Also known as
Canary Island date palm

Where is it originally from?
Canary Islands

What does it look like?
Large palm (<18 m tall) with single, thick, non-branching trunk (1.2 m diameter) with a diamond-shaped pattern from old leaf scars and large crown of foliage at the top of the trunk. Long, stiff leaves (<1.8 m) are made up of many leaflets that are dark green, lance-shaped and pointed (30-45 cm long), and the leaf stalk is covered with sharp, shiny green spines (5-8 cm) with a feathery appearance. Branched clusters of creamy yellow-white flowers open from a husk-like structure (Oct-Nov) on a long stem amongst the leaves, and are followed by fleshy, date-like fruit (1-5 cm long), ripening from orange-yellow to dark purple in summer.

Photo: Trevor James

Why is it weedy?
Thrives in a variety of habitats and soil types, tolerating cold and warmth, drought and floods, shade and sun, and salt spray as well as mountain climates. Sharp spines can cause injury to humans and animals.

How does it spread?
Seed is spread by birds and water.

What damage does it do?
Displaces native trees through sheer size, and the growth of seedlings can produce an impenetrable, long-lived subcanopy. Reduces water tables and can alter dune form through sand build up around its roots and resulting erosion elsewhere.

Photo: Trevor James

Which habitats is it likely to invade?
Sandy soils and other coastal sites, islands, urban areas, and water courses

What can I do to get rid of it?
1. Physical removal - Dig out seedlings and small plants (all year round).
2. Cut and paste (all year round). Cut the stem/trunk as close to the ground as possible and cover the entire stump with herbicide as soon as possible after cutting. Apply glyphosate gel (120g/L strength)
3. Drill or frill - Drill downward sloping holes around the circumference of the trunk about 8-10 cm apart, or Frill (make deep cuts into the sapwood at regular intervals around the base of the tree, taking care not to ring-bark the plant). Fill the holes with undiluted 'neat' glyphosate (360g/L active ingredient) or saturate the frill cuts with glyphosate (360g/L active ingredient) mixed at 250ml/L
4. Foliar spray (full leaf stage only) - Apply herbicide using a hand held sprayer/knapsack to plants <1m tall or gun and hose for larger infestations. Apply glyphosate (360 g/L active ingredient) herbicide at 20ml/L plus organosilicone penetrant (2ml/L) to cover entire plant.
Note: Glyphosate overspray will kill other (desirable) plants.
CAUTION: When using any herbicide or pesticide, PLEASE READ THE LABEL THOROUGHLY to ensure that all instructions and directions for the purchase, use and storage of the product, are followed and adhered to.

Photo: Carolyn Lewis

What can I do to stop it coming back?
Retreat any survivors after 1-2 months. Monitor the site for reinfestation or germination of seed bank. If possible track down and remove the seed source.