

Dear Monarch,

I love palm trees and feel that they belong in a Californian yard. My HOA, however, has a rule against planting them (as well as other plants I like!). Why?

PLANT RESTRICTIONS

Dear Concerned Resident,

There's no such thing as a "bad" plant but some plants have ended up out of place. Palms are *not* native to our area and have brought with them some serious concerns. This is true of many species that are sold in nurseries but are in fact hazardous in our landscape.

- Palms are problematic because they are greedy with water, provide no shade, erosion control, or support for beneficial wildlife, and are invasive. If you have palms in your community, you will notice the fruit is carefully removed to prevent critters from spreading the seeds. When palms sprout in landscaped and native areas, they are difficult to eradicate and steal resources from other plants.
- What about olives? These iconic trees are also invasive – creatures are attracted to the fruit and will happily spread them where they don't belong. Some non-fruiting varieties may be allowable in your community, though. Olives are also susceptible to several diseases, two of which have no cure (*Xylella* and *Verticillium*).
- Other invasive species you may see for sale are non-native grasses like *Stipa* or *Nassella* (Mexican feather grass) and *Cortaderia* (pampas grass). Common groundcovers like *Hedera* (ivy), *Vinca* (periwinkle), and *Carpobrotus* (highway iceplant, not to be confused with other plants marketed as "ice plant" that do not belong to this genus) are also invasive. Many of these plants were installed in our area before they were recognized as invasive and are still available to the public.
- Not all "palms" or "grasses" are equal. There are plenty of alternative species within plant groups or in similar-looking groups that are acceptable for the community landscape and home gardens. Understanding the restrictions for your landscape is key in making sustainable plant choices. Take your list to a local nursery and consult with the experts to find the right plants for you.

MONARCH TIP

Learn more about invasive species (and their alternatives) from the California Invasive Plant Council: <https://www.cal-ipc.org/>