



JEFF DUEWEL/Daily Courier

Jason Lovell, owner of palm tree wholesale business Hooked On Palms in Grants Pass, stands next to Chinese windmill fan palms, by far the most abundant palm tree growing in this area. He estimates there are close to 500 in the Grants Pass area, all transplanted here.

Bring a little piece of paradise into your yard

On Jason Lovell's property south of Grants Pass, two stately palm trees sway ever so slightly in the breeze.

They were supposed to go to the In-N-Out Burger on the north end of town, but the burger giant went with different foliage after its palms at the Medford shop were not thriving.

Story and photos by Jeff Duewel

Don't let that sway your thinking about palms, said Lovell, who said In-N-Out simply didn't plant the trees correctly.

"They planted them in solid sand," Lovell said. "You can't do that here with our wet winters. They need soil."

Certain palm trees do well in Southern Oregon, and they've been here awhile, many from the influx of Californians beginning decades ago who evidently wanted to bring the tropics with them.

Lovell estimates there are 500 palm trees in the immediate Grants Pass area. They're not native, of course, but they seem to do fine.

"They're really hardy. People have planted those all the way up to Washington, D.C. on the East Coast," Lovell said.

"There are some properties in the Rogue Valley, if you blindfolded people, then took it off, they'd think they were in Hawaii," said palm tree guru Leroy Tomes of Medford, who last year sold Lovell and his wife Kellie his business, Hooked on Palms.

Tomes, originally from Nebraska, spotted his first palm tree in Medford of all places, and started the business in 1982.

"The first palm tree I ever saw growing outside is across the street from where I live in Medford," he said.

Over the years Hooked on Palms grew and eventually sold palms to half the nurseries in the Pacific Northwest.

Between Tomes and Lovell and the web-

site hookedonpalms.com, you can dial in everything you need to know about palms in Southern Oregon.

Ten to 15 varieties can survive around here, but Lovell estimates 95 percent of them are Chinese windmill fan palm trees. They can handle plenty of cold, down to zero degrees Fahrenheit, well below freezing.

Every one of the 170 trees on Lovell's property, waiting to be sold wholesale, is a windmill fan palm.

Some established trees really stand out in Grants Pass.

On Madrone Street across from the Grants Pass High track and field stadium, one stands close to 40 feet tall. Tomes believes it's the largest in Southern Oregon. A few blocks away on Hefley, Chuck DeJanvier and his wife Marsha Young have an easy time giving directions to their home.

"Look for the palm tree. That's how we tell people where we live," Young said.

DeJanvier said they ran into the people who planted the tree at a garage sale, so they have a good idea it was planted in the early 1960s.

It's about 30 feet tall, right in the front yard.

That's about the size of the pair originally headed to In-N-Out, now in Lovell's yard.

Lovell grew up in Medford, but got into surfing and fell in love with the beach when visiting California. Through a jack-of-all trades career that includes auto restoration, and Josephine County Corrections, he continued his love of the tropical environs.

When he bought his new property last year, he told his wife "I want some palm trees." She said "Go find some."

He stumbled on Tomes' business and website, and got so interested he ended up buying the client list and inventory for himself as Tomes pointed toward retirement.

Lovell's expertise has grown quickly. Lovell said palms have to have lots of

water, but must be planted in quality, well-drained soil.

"They like to be moist, but they can't be sitting in water," Lovell said.

He recommended digging a hole a foot wider in diameter than the pot, and placing a layer of sand at the bottom for drainage. Then, quality potting soil mixed with some normal dirt should get the tree growing.

Be patient because they're slow growers. They require more water than your typical Northwest trees — Lovell recommends giving them a good soaking once a week or so in the summer.

They also need fertilization. Tomes said

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Oregon palms

Palm trees in Southern Oregon? Get used to it. They're here to stay. Perhaps they'll become the norm, with the earth warming.

And it's not the farthest north you'll find them either.

Ross Roe, who notices trees around town and has been involved with planting conifer saplings at his annual tree plant in February for the last quarter century, mentioned the island of Sor-Hilde off the west coast of Norway.

This little paradise has transplanted palms that survive, thanks to moderating ocean currents.

His wife Annette visited there a few years back on a cruise, and marveled at it.

And for the record, Ross Roe's grandmother's name was Palma.

Here's a partial glimpse of palm trees around town, much farther south than Sor-Hilde.

- The most impressive array is likely the palms at Si Casa Flores, 202 N.E. Beacon Drive. The restaurant is surrounded by them, approximately 25 strong.

- Six palms guard the perimeter at Best Way Inn, 1253 N.E. Sixth Street.

- A cluster of palms can be found around the intersection of Northeast Steiger and Sixth streets, in front of three businesses.

- Jack-in-the-Box, 120 N.E. Hillcrest Drive, has numerous small palms.

- The tallest palm in town is in the front yard of a home in the 700 block of Madrone Street, near Grants Pass High.

- At 755 S.E. Sixth St., near the Bliss Stop, stands another burly palm.

- Paradise Car Wash, 110 N.E. Hillcrest Drive, has some palms.

- In the 1000 block of Northeast Hefley Street, a sturdy palm dominates the front yard of a residence.

- Two are in the yard of the home at Bridge and Western.

- On Southeast N Street, where Rogue Drive dead-ends, another large palm stands lonely in a vacant lot.

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