

FORT MYERS FLORIDA WEEKLY®

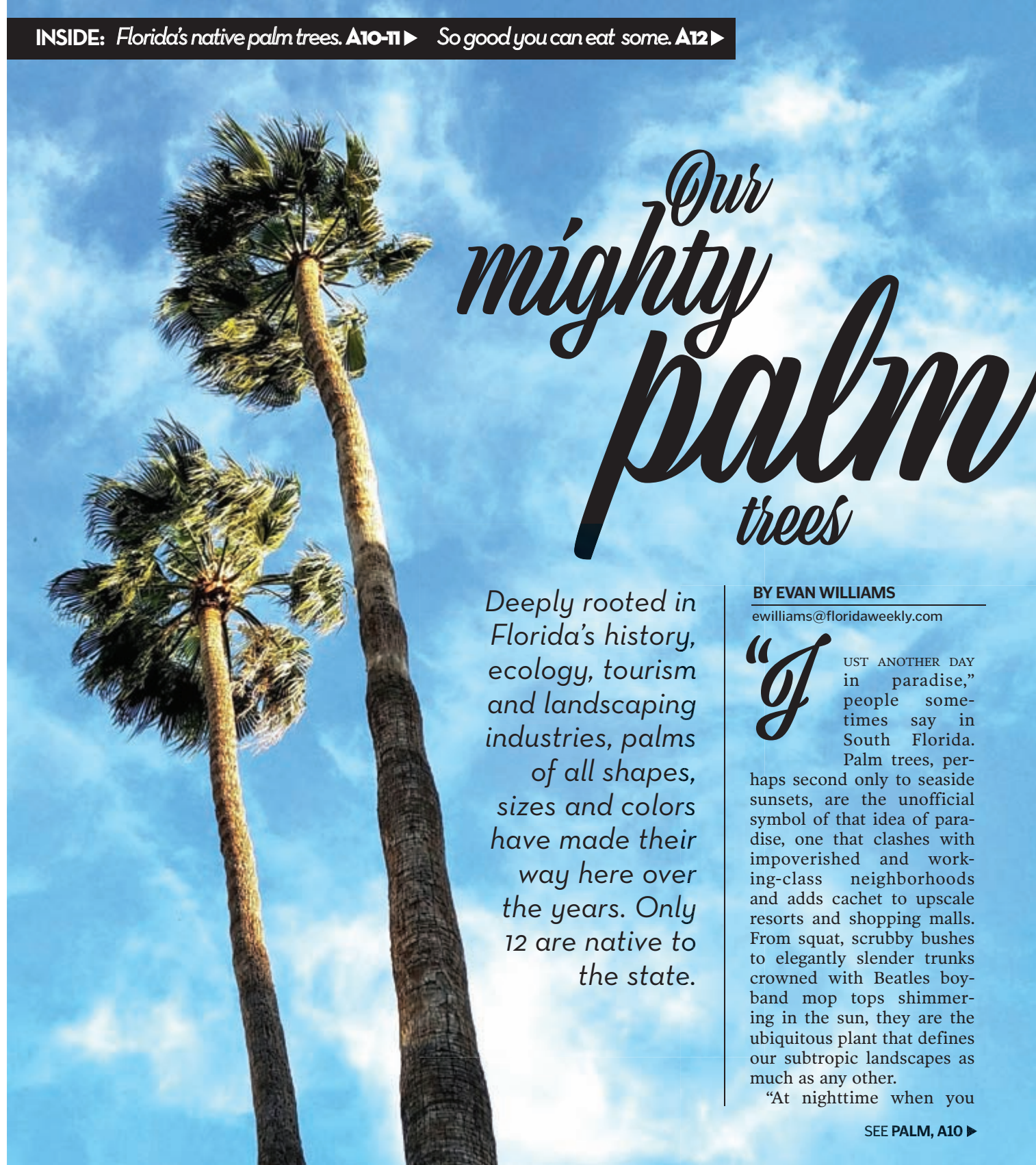
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WEEK OF FEBRUARY 28-MARCH 6, 2018

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INSIDE: Florida's native palm trees. **A10-T1** ▶ So good you can eat some. **A12** ▶



Our mighty palm trees

Deeply rooted in Florida's history, ecology, tourism and landscaping industries, palms of all shapes, sizes and colors have made their way here over the years. Only 12 are native to the state.

BY EVAN WILLIAMS

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"IUST ANOTHER DAY in paradise," people sometimes say in South Florida. Palm trees, perhaps second only to seaside sunsets, are the unofficial symbol of that idea of paradise, one that clashes with impoverished and working-class neighborhoods and adds cachet to upscale resorts and shopping malls. From squat, scrubby bushes to elegantly slender trunks crowned with Beatles boy-band mop tops shimmering in the sun, they are the ubiquitous plant that defines our subtropic landscapes as much as any other.

"At nighttime when you

SEE PALM, **A10** ▶

COURTESY IMAGE

Turow, creator of the modern legal thriller, tops reading fest

BY NANCY STETSON

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Somewhere, someone should create a statue of novelist Scott Turow and erect it in a public space, because the man achieved the near-impossible: He took the dusty, regimented, micro footnote-happy law and transformed it into something fascinating for us non-lawyers to enjoy: the modern legal thriller.

He certainly wasn't the first lawyer to write novels about his profession, but



TUROW

his 1987 debut novel, "Presumed Innocent," kicked the door open for the genre. It spent 45 weeks on the New York Times Bestseller List and spawned a 1990 movie of the same name, starring Harrison Ford, Brian Dennehy, Greta Scacchi, Bonnie

Bedelia and Raul Julia.

For decades since, lawyers have been

following in his footsteps, penning their own novels: John Grisham, Lisa Scottoline, Robert Rotenberg, Stephen L. Carter, David Balducci, Alafair Burke, and even Marcia Clark, who was lead prosecutor in the OJ Simpson murder trial.

Some have gladly left the profession for the writing life, while others, like Mr. Turow, do both.

Mr. Turow, who began his writing career with "One L," a memoir about his first year

SEE READ, **A15** ▶

INSIDE



Special section

It's always better on the water. Find out how and where with our special section. **INSIDE** ▶



Who will win?

Oscars poised for 90th year of movie awards bliss. **C1** ▶



Top picks

Check out our calendar with top picks of things to do this week. **C6-10** ▶



Networking

Red Sox host open house at JetBlue Park. **A38** ▶

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in the know

Palm trees native to Florida



Paurotis Palm
Acoelorrhaphe wrightii



Silver Palm
Coccothrinax argentata



Buccaneer Palm
Pseudophoenix sergentii



Needle Palm
Rhapidophyllum hystrix



Royal Palm
Roystonea regia



Scrub Palmetto
Sabal etonia

COURTESY PHOTOS

PALM

From page 1

see that sunset and it's just gorgeous and you have that silhouette of a palm tree in the sky, it does make you feel like you're someplace exotic for sure," said Debbie Hughes, senior horticulturalist at the Edison & Ford Winter Estates in Fort Myers.

Though hundreds of exotic palms have been imported to Florida, only a dozen are native to the state, includ-

ing sabal or cabbage palms (*Sabal palmetto*), the official state tree. Its hearts were once often used to make swamp cabbage, a traditional Seminole Indian and old Florida vegetable. The Miami palm (*Sabal miamiensis*) may already be extinct in the wild while the shrubby saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) is as common as a weed, its berries or drupes providing food for hundreds of species of wildlife as well as a common remedy to treat an enlarged prostate and other conditions.

Out-of-state varieties includes coconut palms (*Cocos nucifera*), which may be native to Asia, though exact origin

is unknown. At least a few dozen exotic palm varieties are grown in nurseries and used in landscaping; \$592 million worth of palms and tropical foliage grown in the Sunshine State were sold in 2015, a University of Florida study found.

"In the cities and urban areas we see primarily ornamental palms planted," said Brian Bahder, an assistant professor specializing in insect vector technology



BAHDER

with the University of Florida/IFAS in Davie. "But in the Everglades and in a lot of the natural habitat we have a handful of native species of palm that are just as beautiful (and) since they're native here they're an important species from an ecological standpoint."

They are also an indelible part of our past. The Historical Society of Palm Beach County recounts the history of the Spanish brig *Providencia*, which in 1878 wrecked on the shore of what is now the town of Palm Beach, home to the many-palmed Mar-a-Lago resort. The ship's cargo of coconuts spawned new palms and gave both the county



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— **Debbie Hughes**, senior horticulturalist at the Edison & Ford Winter Estates in Fort Myers

LEE VISITOR'S CONVENTION BUREAU



Miami Palm
Sabal miamiensis



Dwarf Palmetto
Sabal minor



Cabbage or Sabal Palm
Sabal palmetto



Saw Palmetto
Serenoa repens



Key Thatch Palm
Thrinax morrisii



Florida Thatch Palm
Thrinax radiate

and city their names.

On the southwest coast, Fort Myers' nickname "City of Palms" is rooted in the towering royal palms (*Roystonea regia*) planted along McGregor Boulevard, their smooth, majestic trunks like freshly-poured concrete. Thomas and Mina Edison were responsible for their first planting along what was then a cattle trail. After 1906, the Edisons paid for the palms to be planted along about a half-mile stretch starting at their winter estate, and the city agreed to care for them in perpetuity, explained Ms. Hughes with the Edison & Ford Estates. The city has since planted many more, further out along McGregor, and replaced others lost in time.

"We probably have a couple that are still I would say originals so that means they're over 100 years old," Ms. Hughes said. "There's quite a few new ones, of course, because of disease or old age or cars hit them."

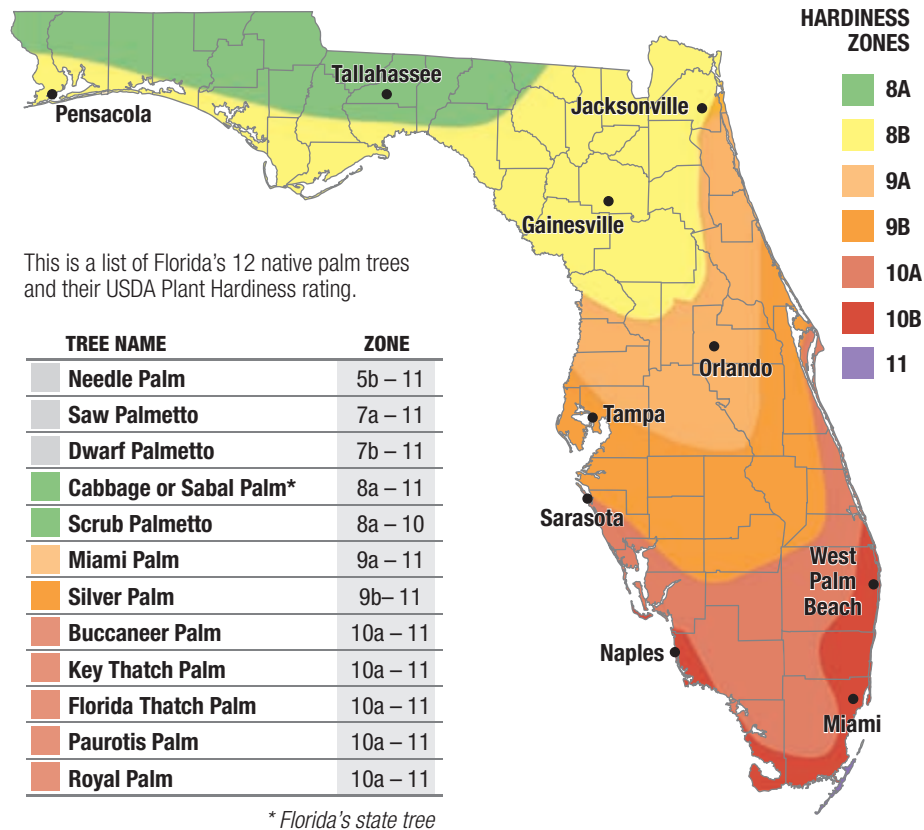
One of the most serious diseases to affect palms in recent years is called Texas Phoenix Palm Decline, ravaging a handful of Phoenix varieties including Canary Island date palms (*Phoenix canariensis*) and the state tree, the cabbage palm.

First discovered in Florida in 2006 in the central coastal region from Sarasota to Tampa, it is a fatal, systemic disease caused by bacteria spread by a still unknown insect vector. Since then, it has spread to at least 22 counties in the state, including Lee, Charlotte and Palm Beach.

"It seems that the Phoenix palms are the most susceptible and those are the high value trees and those are the ones that the state (is) planting along the

Florida native palm tree hardiness

There are over 2,500 different palm tree species in the world and almost all of them can be grown in Florida. This map shows the USDA Plant Hardiness Zones in Florida. These zones are based on average annual minimum temperature in five degree increments. For instance, the temperature for zone 10b is 35 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit, while 10a is 30 to 35 degrees Fahrenheit.



This is a list of Florida's 12 native palm trees and their USDA Plant Hardiness rating.

SOURCES: EDWIN M. EVERHAM, FGCU; STEPHEN BROWN, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA/IFAS, USDA, FLORIDA-PALM-TREES.COM

FLORIDA WEEKLY GRAPHICS

highways," said Dr. Bahder. "Unfortunately, it's one of the prettier palms but it's highly susceptible."

"It's predominantly in the central part of the state but it is moving further

north and further south, slowly creeping in those directions," Dr. Bahder said.

He is working to identify the vector, collecting insects from the trees when there is a known outbreak and trying

to identify which one is spreading the disease. There is currently a short list of five or six candidates. He expects to pinpoint which is the vector over the next few years and help create management strategies so the disease is "not causing significant economic loss or significant ecological damage."

While palms are often referred to as "trees," they are monocots instead of dicots, making them closer in nature to a grass.

"It's not a grass, and it's not a tree either," said Stephen Brown, horticulture extension agent with the University of Florida/IFAS in Lee County. "So when you say 'palm tree,' it's a misnomer; it's actually just 'palm.'"

Similar to grasses, palms have a fibrous root system like a thick, matted carpet and parallel instead of criss-crossing leaf veins, said Larry Noblick, palm biologist at Montgomery Botanical Center in Miami.

"I kind of like to think of palms as being like grasses on steroids, but they are really in a different family altogether," he said.

Their grass-like root system is also one of the features that helps make them naturally resistant to hurricane-force winds.

"They have a fanning root system that radiates out from the center, and then they're also limber," said Joel Crippen, horticulturalist with Mounts Botanical Garden in West Palm Beach. "Now some palms, like a royal palm, aren't limber at all and it has a mechanism where it will abort the fronds in high winds. Usually the only times you'll see a palm go over is if the ground gets super saturated and soggy."

SEE PALM, A12 ►



Sunrise on Palm Beach Island.

COURTESY PHOTO

Palms so good you could almost eat them? Here's how

BY EVAN WILLIAMS

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Since 1967, a Swamp Cabbage Festival has been held in LaBelle in Hendry County. It includes a parade, armadillo races, live music and plenty of swamp cabbage vendors. This year the festival was Feb. 24-25.

Recipes from LaBelle Community Women's Club 1984 Swamp Cabbage Festival Cookbook are below.

Cooked swamp cabbage

Place 2 or 3 meaty pieces of ham hock or other seasoning meat in a stewing pot and cover with water. Simmer for a half-hour or so to create a stock. Add the meat from 2 to 4 swamp cabbage (or 2 to 5 cans of the canned product). The amount of cabbage used depends on the number to be fed.

Add water, if necessary, cover and salt to taste. Tasting is necessary because some salting will be derived from the meat.

Add a little garlic salt — or a lot — to your taste. Add black pepper, again according to taste. In the matter of black pepper in swamp cabbage, let me refer you to Mark Twain's statement pertaining to the amount of Bourbon to put in egg-nog. "Too much is just exactly enough." Regardless of the amount used, it is essential that the pepper be cooked with the cabbage.

The mixture should be brought to a slow boil and the heat reduced to allow it to simmer for half an hour or longer until the cabbage meat is tender.

If the amount of cabbage meat is limited, or if you prefer your cabbage without much "juice," or if unexpected company shows up, simply add a cup or two of rice to the pot after the cabbage is brought to a boil. If you use rice to thicken or extend a pot of cabbage, stir occasionally to prevent sticking and add a little water, if necessary, to maintain the desired texture.

About two minutes before serving, add just a dash of Tabasco Sauce and stir well.

Swamp Cabbage Fritters "Cracker Style"

4 cups swamp cabbage cooked and drained
1 cup chopped onions
2 eggs
Salt and pepper to taste

Self-rising flour mixed into above sufficient to give it the consistency of mashed potatoes.

Drop by teaspoonful into ¼-inch hot fat and fry to golden brown.

The addition of ½ to ¾ cups of beer to recipe just prior to cooking and the addition of flour makes a really tasty, man-sized treat, often prepared by hunters and woodsmen.

This recipe, one of LaBelle's favorites, is from Mary Dyess, daughter of a LaBelle pioneering family, the Forreys, whose restaurant, Flora & Ella's, was an area landmark. Variations of this recipe are served by a goodly number of LaBelle families for special cookouts or party occasions. ■



PALM

From page 11

Edwin Everham, a professor of marine and ecological sciences at Florida Gulf Coast University, studied roughly 1,200 sabal palms in the wild after Hurricane Charley in 2004. He found that less than 2 percent had been killed by the storm.

"The fronds from the palms will get shed in high wind almost like they're being pruned by the wind and that then leaves them with a bare trunk that's pretty resistant to the wind," he said.

Although the total number of palm types worldwide is "kind of controversial," biologist Mr. Noblick said, he estimates there are around 2,800.

One of the rarest, *Copernicia ekmanii*, which are endemic to Haiti, can be found at Naples Botanical Garden. It is disappearing in Haiti amid natural disasters and deforestation.

"It to me is just the most elegant palm," said the garden's vice president of horticulture, Brian Galligan. "That is one we really want to go to Haiti and collect more of." ■

"I kind of like to think of palms as being like grasses on steroids, but they are really in a different family altogether."

— Larry Noblick, palm biologist at Montgomery Botanical Center in Miami

