

**Plates 670 and 671 *Cordyline fruticosa***

*Dracaena terminalis*

'Ti'

Otaheite, Society Islands

13 April - 1 June and 4 June - 13 July

1769



*Cordyline fruticosa* is an evergreen flowering plant in the family Asparagaceae. Common names include ti plant, palm lily, cabbage palm and good luck plant.

The thin lance-shaped leaves are up to 30 inches in length and are 6 inches wide. It has small scented white to mauve flowers and red berries.

This well-known species of *Cordyline* originated somewhere in the vicinity of Papua New Guinea but was long ago spread through the Pacific by Melanesian and Polynesian peoples who valued its starchy rhizomes as food.

These plants are of great cultural importance in the animistic religions of the Austronesian and Papuan peoples. They are often planted outside dwellings to protect the people from evil spirits. They are also cultivated for traditional medicines and dyes, while the fleshy rhizomes can be used for food. Traditional Hawaiian skirts were often made with ti leaves.

Although these plants enjoy the heat and humidity of their natural tropical conditions they adapt well to growing indoors. The plant can grow to at least 10 feet, but is often seen as a 3 – 6 foot shrub in gardens in the South East of England. The 1 – 2 foot high 'False Palm' is a popular house plant.

***Cordyline australis***

*Cordyline australis* is a cultivar of the *Cordyline* species from New Zealand. It is a hardy tree and in its native habitat can grow up to 40 feet in height, with spear-shaped leaves some 3 feet long; growing in forest margins, river banks and swampy areas.

*Cordyline australis* is sun hardy and tolerates salt spray near the sea. It is resistant to desiccation - as shown by an account of felled trees lying on a beach for eight months,

swamped by tides and hot sun, eventually being washed up on fresh soil and taking root there.

The common name is 'Cabbage tree', possibly so named as the young shoots were used as a vegetable. Parts of the plant have also been used by Maori people to treat injuries and illnesses. It has strong fibres suitable for textiles such as ropes, fishing lines and baskets.

The European cultivar is a small evergreen tree growing up to 12 feet tall. It usually has a tall trunk with a long mass of narrow leaves which produce long racemes of small whitish fragrant flowers.

The Cabbage tree is a best choice as an outdoor tub plant, being a distinctive feature of coastal gardens in southern England where it is often called the Torbay Palm. When grown as a 3 – 4 foot high indoor house plant, it is called a Grass Palm.

Pamela Newton

### Sources

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