



Artwork by Priscilla Fawcett

Silver Top Palm

SCIENTIFIC NAME

Coccothrinax argentata

FAMILY

Areaceae

OTHER NAMES

Tops, Thatch Palm, Silver Thatch Palm, Bay Top Palm, Florida Silver Palm

DESCRIPTION

The Silver Top Palm grows into a medium size tree up to 10 meters in height and approximately 15 cm in diameter. The bark is smooth. Leaves are arranged spirally at the top of the trunk. The leaf base is expanded into a fibrous sheath. The leaves are palmate (arranged like the palm of a hand) to approximate 75 cm (30 inches) wide. The underside of the leaf has silvery hairs on it giving the species its common name.

HABITAT AND DISTRIBUTION

This species occurs throughout all of the islands of the Bahamas, south Florida, Mexico as well as the Caribbean. It can be found in open coppices, pinelands, scrublands and other such areas. In many areas it is the dominant species forming a Palm Shrubland (Palm Coppice) or Silver top Pineland community.

REPRODUCTION

The small, white and fragrant flowers are produced on 5-7.5 cm (2-3 inches) stems in early summer. The flowers are complete (having both male and female parts). The fruit is round and red turning purple or black in late summer when ripe.

USES AND IMPORTANCE

The dried leaves are heavily used in straw work for making hats, baskets, mats and many other items. The leaves are also used in roofing and the plant is often used as an ornamental.

The fruits are readily eaten by birds.

INTERESTING FACTS

There is a closely related endemic species (*Coccothrinax inaguensis*) that occurs in the southern Bahamian islands.

In the Florida Keys, an endangered species called the Key Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus clavium*) depends on fruits of the Silver Top Palm for food.