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ponytail palm



Photo courtesy of Hermann Engelmann Greenhouses, Inc.

BOTANICAL NAME

Beaucarnea recurvata
(bow-KAR-nee-a re-kur-VAT-a)
syn. *Nolina recurvata*, *N. tuberculata*

COMMON NAMES

Ponytail palm, bottle palm, elephant foot tree

DESCRIPTION

Beaucarnea, a member of the *Agavaceae* family, is a slow-growing plant that doesn't require constant care, so it's ideal for those who want a long-lasting houseplant, even in the absence of a green thumb. Commonly known as ponytail palm,

Beaucarnea bears narrow, gray-green or dark green foliage that arches out from a large bulblike trunk, causing it to somewhat resemble a palm. In addition, the leaves emanate from a central point like a ponytail, thus the name. Although it may take years to do so, this plant could grow to as tall as 8 feet indoors.

DECORATIVE LIFE

With proper care, individual plants can live for many years.

AVAILABILITY

Beaucarnea plants are available year-round.

Beaucarnea recurvata—Ponytail palm, Bottle palm, Elephant foot tree

in-store and consumer care

LIGHT Bright light, especially from spring through fall, is required.

WATER From spring through fall, water moderately and allow the potting medium to dry between each watering. Throughout the winter months, the plant requires very little water and should be kept almost dry from November to March.

TEMPERATURE Average room temperatures—between 65 F and 75 F—are ideal. *Beaucarnea* is chill sensitive, so it should never be exposed to temperatures below 50 F.

HUMIDITY A dry environment is best for *Beaucarnea*, and misting is not necessary.

FERTILIZER During spring and summer only, established plants can be treated to monthly feedings with a balanced houseplant fertilizer. Plant food should *not* be applied in fall and winter.

PROPAGATION *Beaucarneas* are propagated from seed. Offsets, which may occasionally appear near the plant's base, could be potted, but getting new plants to grow from these is difficult, at best.

PRUNING Under low-light conditions, brown leaf tips are common. These should be snipped off with sharp scissors. Otherwise, no pruning is required.

REPOTTING When the base of the trunk has grown to within two inches of the pot's circumference, repotting is recommended



Photo courtesy of The John Henry Company

B. recurvata—Ponytail palm, Bottle palm, Elephant foot tree

using an easily draining medium such as potting soil for cacti. Ideally, repotting should be done in the spring.

challenges

PESTS AND PROBLEMS Aphids and spider mites may occasionally infest *Beaucarnea*. If this occurs, the plant should be isolated and its leaves cleaned with a cloth and soapy water. Regular cleaning will help prevent further infestations. However, this plant's modest water requirements pose the greatest challenge to its care. Overwatering, especially in winter, is the most common cause of poor plant performance.

LEAF CONCERNS Brown leaf tips typically signal improper watering and/or insufficient sunlight. If this occurs, the brown tips should be removed with sharp scissors, and excessive watering should be avoided.

SHRIVELED BASE If *Beaucarnea's* bulbous base becomes darkened and shriveled,

fun facts

WHAT'S IN A NAME The name "palm," as in the plant's common names of ponytail and bottle, are misnomers. This plant is not a palm at all; instead, it is a succulent. The names are derived from the arching appearance of the palmlike foliage that sprays from the plant's base.

FAMILY *Beaucarnea* plants are members of the *Agavaceae* (*Agave*) family. Close relatives include *Sansevieria* (snake plant and mother-in-law's tongue), *Cordyline* (ti), *Dracaena*, *Yucca* and *tuberosa*.

HOME SWEET HOME The plant is native to Mexico's desert regions, where it grows like a shrub or tree and can reach heights of 30 feet. In its natural environment, it may survive for hundreds of years.

even partially, stem rot or bacterial soft rot is the likely cause. It is unlikely the plant will recover from the damage, which is, at least partially, related to overwatering. **sfr**

Some information provided by:
Botanica, by R.G. Turner Jr. and Ernie Wasson
Chain of Life Network®, www.chainoflifenetWORK.org
The Complete Houseplant Survival Manual,
by Barbara Pleasant
Hermann Engelmann Greenhouses, Inc.,
www.exoticangel.com
The Houseplant Encyclopedia,
by Ingrid Jantra and Ursula Krüger
The House Plant Expert, by Dr. D.G. Hessayon

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