



Trees of Williamstown Botanic Gardens

Botanical Name: *Washingtonia robusta*

Common Name: Washington Palm (Skyduster, Mexican Fan Palm)

Origin: Mexico



Arecaceae (Palmae) is a widespread family of woody monocotyledons which proliferate in tropical regions. The tree-like plants often have solitary trunks but may also be multistemmed and climbing. Palms are grown for their interesting leaves which may be "feather shaped" or "fan shaped" and for leaf arrangements forming attractive trunks. The flowers are a spike or panicle and may be unisexual or bisexual (on the same or different plant). The fruit may be a drupe or single-seeded and edible, as in the case of the coconut (*Cocos nucifera*). Palms are amongst the world's most important plants providing food, oils and fibres, waxes, perfumes, medicines, construction and craft materials.

Washingtonia is named for George Washington (1732 – 1799) the first president of the United States of America. A striking fan shaped palm grown for its tall solitary smooth grey trunk.

A small genus of two species indigenous to the west coast of the USA, Baja California and Sonora, Mexico. Both *Washingtonia robusta* and *Washingtonia filifera* (Petticoat Palm, American Cotton Palm) are widely grown in temperate and tropical parts of the world. Avenues and rows or specimens are planted in the Mildura – Merbein district, Yackandandah, St Arnaud and in many parks and gardens in Melbourne. Plantings occurred in Palm Avenue, Mildura in about 1906 and other plantings occurred in Victoria from the 1920s.

Washington Palms occur in NW Mexico and Baja California growing in gullies often near the sea. Plants are extremely tolerant of high winds and grow well in coastal areas. This palm when young has lattice patterned trunks which mature to tall, narrow grey trunks with a rounded crown of bright shiny green leaves without threads and long panicles hanging beyond the leaves.

The American Cotton Palm (*Washingtonia filifera*) has a thicker trunk and the leaves have cottony threads on the leaflets. A specimen occurs in the Williamstown Botanic Gardens between the pond and house.

The Washington Palm avenue in the Williamstown Botanic Gardens was planted in 1988 as part of a Bicentennial project and replaced an avenue that was planted around 1915.