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How to Care for Ponytail Palms



Photo Credit: Renata.Ka/Shutterstock

Botanical Name:	Beaucarnea recurvata
Plant Type:	Houseplant
Sun Exposure:	Full Sun, Part Sun

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Growing Ponytail Palm

Houseplants: Watering, Lighting, Repotting, and Pests

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)
Last Updated: February 19, 2025



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Ponytail palms, or elephant foot palms, are unique-looking, long-lived indoor plants that thrive on benign neglect. They are straightforward to grow—provided that you don't overwater them! Here's how to grow and care for a ponytail palm in your home.

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About Ponytail Palms

Despite its name and palm-like appearance, the **ponytail palm** is not a true “palm.” In fact, it is more closely related to desert plants in the *Agave* and *Yucca* genera (such as Joshua trees).

The typical ponytail palm consists of a large, domed “stump,” which tapers off into a thinner stem. As the plant ages, one or more rosettes of long, green, leathery leaves develop from the top of

to 3 feet long, but outdoors, they may be double that length.

In its native environment (eastern Mexico), the entire plant has been known to reach up to 30 feet in height! However, ponytail palms grown in gardens as landscape plants don't usually reach more than 10 feet tall.

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Kept indoors, they are rarely taller than 4 feet. However, as [Susan Mahr of the University of Wisconsin-Madison](#) explains, “In containers, ponytail palms will grow slower than if in the ground, and the

needing to be repotted. Moving it to a larger pot will give it room to grow in both height and girth. They can be very long-lived and can easily outlive their owners. However, older plants may be difficult to manage because of sheer size and weight if not kept on the smaller size.”

Care of this plant is generally simple; the most common difficulty is adapting your watering habits to its needs!

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PLANTING

Choosing Soil and a Pot

- Use a fast-draining soil, such as a cacti and succulent potting mix. If you already have potting soil, sand, and perlite on hand, you can create your own

- Select a pot with a hole in the bottom so that excess water can be drained off. Ponytail palms do not like to sit in moist soil for very long.
- Use a clay pot if possible; the porous material will absorb some of the water, drying out the soil more quickly (a good thing for cacti and succulents).

GROWING

How to Care for Ponytail Palms

- Ponytail palms prefer to have as much light as possible, so place the plant in a bright location. Bright, indirect sunlight is best.
- Keep soil fairly dry. Water from spring through fall, allowing the top inch or two of soil to dry completely before re-watering. During the winter, only water occasionally.
- To water, soak the soil and allow the excess water to drain through the bottom of the pot into a dish. Let the pot sit in the dish for several minutes, then

- Fertilize in the spring with a cacti/succulent fertilizer and bring into a brighter room for the summer months.
- Average room temperature is acceptable for most of the year, but to replicate the natural dormancy cycle, keep the plant slightly cooler in the winter (50°–55°F / 10°–13°C).
- Don't let the plant sit too close to cold windows at night during winter, as freezing temperatures can severely damage it.

Repotting a Ponytail Palm

- Ponytail palms will remain small if kept in a small pot. They can go for many years before needing to be repotted. Repotting every other year at the most is all a ponytail palm needs.
- Moving the plant to a larger pot will allow it to grow in height and girth. However, older plants may become challenging to manage due to their sheer size and weight if they are

so of space between the ponytail

palm's trunk and the pot's rim.

- **Note:** Use caution when handling a ponytail palm, as its leaves have tiny serrated edges.

HARVESTING

Propagation

- Rarely, a ponytail palm may produce an offset—a tiny baby plant that stems from the base of the adult plant. These can be cut off at the base when they reach at least 4 inches in height and planted in a succulent potting mix. Before planting, allow the cut wound to heal, then apply some rooting hormone (available online and in nurseries) to encourage the offset to root.

GARDENING PRODUCTS



PESTS/DISEASES

- **Overwatering** can result in stem rot. If you withhold watering, the plant may be able to internally remedy the problem. Signs of stem rot include yellowing leaves and a caudex (the plant's base and stem) that is soft or squishy.
- **Spider mites** and **scale insects** may find their way to the leaves, but can be dealt with by rubbing a cloth of dish soap and water on the stems. Spider mites are evidenced by the presence of spider-like webbing on the plant.
- **Brown tips** on leaves can be a sign of

appropriately. They can also indicate that the plant is getting too much direct sunlight and too little water.

WIT AND WISDOM

- The plant's unusual shape and coloration have granted it another strange nickname: the Elephant's Foot Palm.
- **Are ponytail palms poisonous to cats?**
While the leaves of a ponytail palm are not toxic to feline (or canine) companions, their foliage does have abrasive edges that could irritate a pet's mouth, so we suggest keeping the plant out of reach.

HOUSEPLANT GUIDES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Catherine Boeckmann



Catherine Boeckmann loves nature, stargazing, and gardening so

tent for the Almanac website, and is also a certified master gardener in the state of Indiana. [Read More](#) from [Catherine Boeckmann](#)

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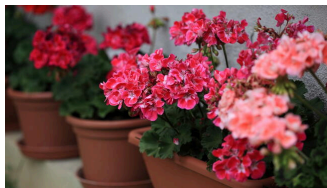
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COMMENTS

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Sheri (not verified) 3 months 2 weeks ago

I have a 10+ year old ponytail palm. It is leaning severely. I have repotted it to try to get it to stay upright, with limited success.

Suggestions?

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[REPLY](#)

Sheila (not verified) 4 months 1 week ago

ted twice, it has grown four feet or more since 2019 and recently there was an offset so i cut it and potted it and now I have this long stem with flowers. male i do believe because they are ivory. These are my babies and love these plants so much.

REPLY

Anthony (not verified) 6 months 2 weeks ago

My daughter just gave me one. I love it... had one while in college 40 years ago. I live in South Florida. Can I keep it outside on an east facing porch that, in the summer, gets direct sun light for 5 hours... or on a covered south facing porch where it gets direct sun for about 5 hours? Does it need more sun light.

REPLY

Joe Bills 6 months 1 week ago

Ponytail palms are tolerant of a pretty wide range of conditions, so I wouldn't hesitate to give it a try in

day light, but even so, five hours of continuous Florida sun might prove stressful. Watch for curling leaves or leaves turning brown, two possible indicators of too much direct sun.

The University of Wisconsin extension service offers some helpful ponytail palm advice:

<https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/articles/ponytail-palm-beaucarnea-recurvata/>

REPLY

Linda Bok (not verified) 6 months 4 weeks ago

I've had a ponytail palm for over a year. It was doing well and now it is totally brown and no green whatsoever. What do I do? Can I trim it back? Do I repot it or is it dead?

REPLY

Ruby Charles (not verified) 7 months ago

had bees all over the place (plant is on porch).
After the bloom died it left a brown stalk and
now the
Palms droop and the plant is not the same

REPLY

Ruby Charles (not verified) 7 months ago
My palm was beautiful about 6fttall) 20plus
years) THEN it bloomed. This is the first time I
had bees all over the place (plant is on porch).
After the bloom died it left a brown stalk and
now the

REPLY

Carol (not verified) 7 months 2 weeks ago
I have a 30 yr. Ponytail plant it,s in my patio
and is probably 15 ft.
It too tall for patio and I,m afraid it will harm if
I put in direct sun direct sunlight. This summer
has been slot 90-100 dg. Any ideas ?
Someone said I could cut half way down and
replant the top and create 2 plants?

REPLY**The Editors** 7 months 2 weeks ago

Hi Carol,

Your ponytail palm sounds incredible. It performs best with as much light as possible and since it is native to semi-desert areas, it can thrive in direct sun, but you would just need to be mindful of the summer months you described when it is extremely hot. It is winter hardy in Zones 10 and 11. Since it needs a new home you could certainly move it to another area of your property (if there is a good location for it) and just keep a watchful eye on it after moving to see how it responds to the conditions. It may take some time to find the right place for it.

As for cutting the trunk and making it two plants, it is not something that is typically done. If you must cut it, you

growing medium, but there is no guarantee that the top part will root. You will definitely want to dip it in rooting hormone. As for what remains, when the top is cut off, it will expose the open trunk so you will need to find a way to protect it from the introduction of diseases and keep it dry.

Hope this helps!

REPLY

Carol (not verified) 7 months 1 week ago

Thank you..

I,m going to move it out from the patio and keep an eye on it.

Thank again for your help.

Carol

REPLY

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