

Cordyline fruticosa

[Synonyms : *Aletris chinensis*, *Asparagus terminalis*, *Convallaria fruticosa*, *Cordyline terminalis*, *Cordyline terminalis* var. *ferrea*, *Cordyline terminalis* var. *ti*, *Dracaena ferrea*, *Dracaena hybrida*, *Dracaena terminalis*, *Taetsia ferrea*, *Taetsia fruticosa*, *Taetsia terminalis*, *Terminalis fruticosa*]

CABBAGE PALM is an evergreen palm-like shrub or tree. Native to eastern Asia and to Australia, it has small, white, cream or reddish flowers.

It is also known as *Andong* (Javanese), *Bloddracena* (Swedish), Boundary mark, Broad leaf cordyline, *Caña de indio* (Spanish), Chinese colli, Cordyline, *Croto* (Spanish), *Dracaena palm*, Dragon's blood, *Dratsena verkhushechnaia* (Russian), False palm, Good luck plant, *Hanjuwang* (Sundanese), Hawaiian ti, *Jeluang* (Malay, Sumatran), *Keulenlilie* (German), *Ki* (Hawaiian), *Kordilina* (Russian), Landmark, *Mapumamia* (Thai), *Pabola* (Spanish), Palm lily, Polynesian ti plant, Rayo, *Sawang* (Borneo, Malay), *Ti* (Fijian, German, Samoan), Ti plant, Ti-pore, Tree-of-kings, *Verililjapuu* (Finnish), and *Zhu jiao* (Chinese).

There are many cultivated varieties.

Fruticosa is Latin (bushy, become bushy).

Cabbage palms are often cultivated domestically for their ornamental value – and their curiosity. The shrub has an amazing tenacity for life as a small piece of its stem, even if seemingly lifeless, will produce leaves if it is planted in damp soil or put in water.

Locally the sweet root was often baked and eaten and the leaves have been used to wrap fish for baking, particularly in some of the Polynesian islands. In the past in Hawaii the roots have also been fermented and made into a powerful alcoholic drink. The Maoris introduced cabbage palm to New Zealand (long before any Europeans made an appearance in the area) and they cultivated a small amount for the stems which they cooked and ate.

Some of the Polynesian islands have fed the leaves to cattle as fodder.

In some areas, such as Hawaii and Samoa, the leaves have been made into disposable grass skirts that were worn particularly when fishing on reefs. Leaf fibre has also been made into a rough cloth.

Hawaiians once used the leaves for thatching, and also played a crude flute-like musical instrument fashioned from a rolled fresh leaf. For Hawaiians the cabbage palm was sacred to Lono – the god with whom they initially confused James Cook (1728-1779), the celebrated English navigator. This was a more than unfortunate misunderstanding as sadly it led to his death. (The cabbage palm is actually sacred in many parts of Polynesia as well.)

For some of the Malaysian islands red-leaved plants have held special, benevolent powers and played a role in many rituals, apart from wedding ceremonies. They have also been found planted on the edge of graveyards and at the corners of homes to repel evil spirits.

Cabbage palm is believed to have first appeared in Britain in about 1770 when it was received at the Botanic Gardens at Kew from Benjamin Torrin, an employee of the East India Company.

In Malaysia the leaves have provided a veterinary medicine for treating elephants.

Medicinally, local Malaysians have applied leaf poultices to wounds received from stinging fish. While in Hawaii it was used for treating fever and some lung disorders.