

Serenoa repens

[Synonyms : *Brahea serrulata*, *Chamaerops serrulata*, *Corypha obliqua*, *Corypha repens*, *Diglossophyllum serrulata*, *Sabal dealbata*, *Sabal serrulata*, *Serenoa repens* forma *glauca*, *Serenoa serrulata*]

SAW PALMETTO is an evergreen palm. Native to the south-eastern United States (from Florida and Texas to South Carolina) it has tiny fragrant, cream flowers.

It is also known as Dwarf palmetto, Fan palmetto, *Ju chi zong* (Chinese), *Sabal*, *Sägepalme* (German), *Sägezahnpalme* (German), Scrub palmetto, and *Serenoapalmu* (Finnish).

Repens is derived from Latin *repto* meaning ‘creeping, crawling’.

The purple-black berries (bunches of them can weigh as much as 9 lb.) and ground seed were harvested for food by some North American Indian tribes and subsequently the white settlers. Specifically records show that the fruit and trunk certainly provided the Seminole Indians with food.

Both the Choctaw and Seminole tribes used the stems for basketry. The leaves have been used for thatching too and the roots have provided scrubbing brushes – particularly for the Seminole tribe. The plant was also used by the Seminole for making the fans and rattles they used in ceremonial dances, as well as for making tourists’ mementos.

American settlers believed that the fruit offered both a medicinal sedative, and a tonic.

The plant is popular with bees and its nectar is said to produce a good palm honey.

Today the leaves provide fibre for brushes, and they are also shipped to Germany especially for the Christmas period when they are used to decorate Christian *crèches* in German churches.

Medicinally, herbalists used to recommend it particularly as a remedy for catarrh. Today it can be employed for treating wasting diseases, cystitis and prostate problems. (At the beginning of the 21st Century another plant, *guele* (*Prosopis africana*), is actually preferred for treating prostate cancer but the medical profession has found that if it is combined with saw palmetto its medicinal qualities can be enhanced.)