

Washingtonia filifera

[Synonyms : *Brahea filamentosa*, *Brahea filifera*, *Neowashingtonia filamentosa*, *Neowashingtonia filifera*, *Pritchardia filamentosa*, *Pritchardia filifera*, *Washingtonia filamentosa*, *Washingtonia filifera* var. *robusta*]

PETTICOAT PALM is a fan palm. Native to south-western North America it has small white flowers.

It is also known as California fan palm, Californian washingtonia, California palm, Cotton palm, Desert fan palm, Desert palm, Northern washingtonia, Priest's palm, Thread palm, and *Washington Palme* (German).

Dead leaves remain hanging round the trunk (below the leaf crown) like an Alpine haystack. A fruit cluster can weigh as much as 10 lb.

Filifera is derived from Latin *filum* (thread) and *-fer* (bearing, carrying) meaning 'thread-bearing' with reference to the leaf-edges.

Local North American Indian tribes such as the Cahuilla used the petticoat palm's fronds for building huts (which made them waterproof and windproof) and leaf fibre provided material for basketmaking. Cahuilla children played with hoops made from the leaves, and the stems provided the tribe with material for making cooking utensils (and bows). Both the Cahuilla and the Cocopa Indians put the seeds inside gourds to make rattles – and the former used these (and the leaves) during their rituals.

The small oval, shiny black fruit when eaten fresh or dried and the seeds (when ground into a meal) are said to have a flavour rivalling that of coconut (*Cocos nucifera*). Cahuilla Indians ate them fresh and so did the children in some of the Tohono O'Odham tribe who viewed them as a snack. The Cahuilla stored the dried fruit for future use. Local Indian tribes including the Cahuilla used the ground meal to make bread or porridge – and the Cahuilla have also made the fruit into preserves. Cocopa Indians drank the fruit juice, and the Cahuilla soaked the fruit in water to make a beverage.

The fruit are used to make preserves, and drinks.

Some authorities point out that petticoat palms can provide a haven for many creatures – from the orioles and the canyon wrens in the higher reaches to the tree frogs nearer the ground.

Today petticoat palm is a common sight in streets and gardens in southern California in the United States – as well as in the Canary Islands on the eastern side of the Atlantic.