



SYDNEY  
SUTHERLAND SHIRE

## FACT SHEET

# COCOS PALM

Cocos Palm (*Syargus romanzoffiana*) otherwise known as Queen Palm, is an environmental weed, and a threat to our native wildlife.

The Cocos Palm is native to South America and in the past was widely planted throughout Sydney as a popular street and garden tree due to its affordability, resilience and tropical appearance.

Unfortunately, the Cocos Palm is now recognised in Australia as an environmental weed, which can invade our bush land and pose a risk to native birds and animals, such as flying-foxes. Cocos Palms produce copious amounts of berries (seeds), which drop to the ground and may cause an unpleasant odour if left to ferment. During food shortages, many animals resort to eating the abundant fruits on Cocos Palms planted throughout the Sutherland Shire. However, the tough berries can become slippery when dropped on hard surfaces and may present a choking hazard to pets or small children. Cocos Palm fruit may also attract unwelcome vermin, such as rats, while the small cracks and holes inside palm heads can house pests such as cockroaches and Indian Myna birds.

### DESCRIPTION

- Single-stemmed palm, up to an average height of 12m.
- Fronds are up to 5m long, with green upper surfaces, greyish undersides and leaflets radiating from central leaf stem. They do not self-shed.
- Trunk is grey, sturdy and smooth.
- Fruit is abundant in bunches of orange-yellow, egg-shaped fruits, about 2.5cm in diameter.

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### SEED DISPERSAL

Native animals such as birds, possums and flying-foxes play a very important role within the broader landscape. They are fantastic at dispersing seeds and pollinating native trees in the bush land we all love. However, when animals eat the fruit of Cocos Palms they also disperse these seeds, further spreading the unwanted weed. These seeds easily germinate wherever they land, however they are most successful in lands adjacent to dry eucalypt forests, rivers and streams.

### IMPACTS ON NATIVE ANIMALS

Every year many native birds and animals are impacted by Cocos Palms. Injuries to wildlife can occur in a number of ways:

- Birds and bats may become caught in palm flower sheaths, causing injuries as animals attempt to escape.
- Sticky palm fruits can cause severe constipation; leading to dehydration (in younger animals).
- Unripe Cocos Palm fruits can be toxic to native animals when eaten.
- Native animals can become caught in the palm's strappy frond leaves, and birds and bats may damage their delicate wings on the flower spikes.
- Native birds and animals may come down to ground level to eat dropped fruit, increasing their vulnerability to attack from dogs and cats.

### CONTROL

In the Sutherland Shire, Cocos Palms may be removed without Council approval. If you do not wish to remove your tree, there are other ways to manage them:

- Cut down fruits when they are green and unripe. This will reduce the risk of pets and animals ingesting toxic berries and prevent germination. Fruits can also be removed when they are orange and ripe.
- All fruit and trimmings less than 1m in length should be disposed of in Council-supplied green waste bins for removal as per your regular garden waste collection schedule.
- Cutting the crown off below the lowest frond will destroy the whole palm; however, in an urban or garden area, it may be preferable to remove the palm completely rather than leave a stump.

If you are unsure whether you have a Cocos Palm or a native palm, please seek professional advice prior to tree removal.

### ALTERNATIVES

There are many great native alternatives to Cocos Palms, several of which also offer a safe and natural food source for local wildlife. Examples include the Cabbage Tree Palm, Callistemon (bottlebrush), Grevillea, Lilly Pilly and Melaleuca (paperbark) trees. For further information on creating a wildlife-friendly backyard, please visit Council's website.



Images (left to right): Cocos Palm showing old fronds that do not self shed; the trunk of the Cocos Palm is grey and smooth; the fruit of the Cocos Palm grows in bunches of green (unripe) to orange (ripe), egg-shaped fruits.

### SUTHERLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

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