

# PALM OVER-PRUNING: WHAT IS WITH THE 'MOHAWK' CUT ON PALMS?

Doug Caldwell, U.F. Commercial Horticulture Extension, Collier County.

NO!



Figure 1. *This is excessive pruning on a date palm. Note the 11 to 1 o'clock canopy outline.*

NO!



Figure 2. These sabal palms were pruned too harshly. Sabal palms should be pruned so that the canopy is kept at a more normal 9 o'clock to 3 o'clock outline.

There may be some give and take. And some species may tolerate this approach better than others, **but palms should not be pruned in an 11 o'clock to 1 o'clock position (hurricane cut)**. University of Florida researcher, Dr. Tim Broschat and others contend that **green fronds should not be removed** from palms (unless they are poking through *your* pool screen cage!).

### Some negative and / or potential concerns:

1. Over trimming, by removing healthy green leaves, takes away the energy manufacturing potential of the palm. This can result in "pencil pointing" a sudden reduction in trunk "thickening" at the height in the crown where diameter increase should be taking place. This weak point creates **potential hazard** issues as the canopy is susceptible to wind throw.
2. Over-pruning may contribute to **reduced winter hardiness**.
3. Continual excess pruning of cabbage palms may increase flowering, which can stress the plant.
4. Removing fronds of trees that are suffering potassium and magnesium deficiencies **removes a reservoir of nutrients** and with potassium deficiency, may quickly lead to premature palm death.
5. The removal of too many fronds and the supporting base or "boot" could decrease the built-in stabilizing or shock-absorbing capacity design of the crown and make the remaining fronds and the bud **more susceptible to wind damage**.

**As a rule of thumb**, only prune brown or half-brown fronds. The outline of palm canopies, **for most species, should be about a 9 o'clock to 3 o'clock position**.



Figure 3. Pencil-neck symptom from overpruning this queen palm in Glen Cove. This is now a hazard risk with the narrow and weakened trunk