



The City of Treasure Island, Florida
www.mytreasureisland.org

NEWS RELEASE

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Palm tree disease making a comeback

An old disease involving palm trees is apparently creeping back into Florida.

Don Spatzer drills a small hole in the base of a healthy Christmas palm in front of Treasure Island City Hall and taps a bullet-shaped sleeve into the hole. Then, using a syringe, he injects the tree through the sleeve with "about \$2 worth" of liquid oxytetracycline.

"Small price to pay to prevent this tree from getting sick and dying," he adds, as his crews repeat the procedure, as they will about 150 more times this week, on palm trees throughout the City of Treasure Island.

Spatzer, head of the City of Treasure Island Groundskeeping Division of Public Works, is inoculating as a precautionary measure against the spread of what he suspects is a form of either Lethal Yellowing or Texas Phoenix Palm Decline.

He believes there have been three suspected cases in Treasure Island this year. It's not known when it may have arrived on our shores, but it was probably before the 2004-05 hurricane season.

The contagious diseases, spread by a small insect, was first found in Key West in the early 1950s.

For the most part, coconut palms are susceptible to the disease. In all, approximately 3 dozen species of palm trees are at risk. Other palms that could become sick are the Christmas palm, clustering fishtail palm, date palm, the Pritchardia species and the windmill palm.

Symptoms can vary from tree to tree, but for coconut palms, they include the premature dropping of the fruit. Another symptom is a darkish color in the tips of a normally yellow-colored male flower cluster.

The cost to the city to inoculate a palm is roughly \$2 per tree, three times a year. "There is no cure for these diseases," Spatzer said. "The inoculation simply makes the tree sap taste bad to the bug."

If you suspect you have a palm that could be diseased, call the Pinellas County Cooperative Extension at 727-582-2100 and ask to speak to a horticulturalist or an arborist. They can recommend do-it-yourself inoculations or commercial experts who provide the service.

Want to find out more about Lethal Yellowing or Texas Phoenix Palm Decline? Go to www.mytreasureisland.org and click on the Lethal Yellow FAQ link

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