

*We are pleased to share with Society members, some of the history associated with the creation of what is certainly the most amazing and delightful exotic Mediterranean garden in Canada and perhaps the Pacific Northwest. We are of course referring to the garden of Jeff St.Gelais. Jeff has kindly shared with us the back story on his garden creation, as he and his wife prepare to sell their property and start a new chapter in their lives. Thank you Jeff and Sheryl.*

Over the past three-plus decades, the Pacific Northwest Palm Society has enjoyed the privilege of watching the development of a most amazing garden oasis in Victoria BC. The garden is the result of a vision and the hard work of long-time Society member Jeff St.Gelais. Coming from Ottawa, Jeff was impressed with growing any type of palm. Over the years, the Society has included Jeff's garden in several tours.

His unique, exotic, Mediterranean garden was started in 1987 with the planting of two one-gallon *T. fortunei*. These two trees now have about 25' of trunk (one divided into two trunks). In 1995 Jeff met his wife's cousin, Ray Mattei, the owner of Tropic to Tropic Plants. Starting with hardy bananas (*Musa basjoo*), Ray provided many exotic plants over the years, including palms. In addition, Ray introduced Jeff to the PNWPEPS and Jeff has been a keen Society member ever since.

An early Society highlight for Jeff was his first visit to the amazing garden of Gerard Pury and its exotic feel that Jeff was determined to duplicate. It was that visit that spurred Jeff's passion for palms.

Many of the palms thriving in Jeff's landscape are difficult to find as specimen-size plants, so many were purchased as small palms from California and as mail-order plants from collectors in the Southeast USA. Palm seeds were also obtained from several locations in Europe and Asia.

A truly stunning palm specimen in any garden, Jeff purchased a young *Jubaea chilensis* in 2000. This palm giant now has grown to have 7 feet (2+meters) of trunk over 1 meter in diameter and a full crown over 6 meters across. The garden now boasts three Jubaeas.

Another eye-catching palm is a *Chamaerops humilis cerifera* purchased from a local Victoria nursery. Jeff knew it was odd that such a rare palm was for sale and found out the Victoria supplier was Larry Cole (Tropi-Cole Trading), so gave him a call. Jeff and Larry quickly became good friends (Larry has since passed away). Together they sourced several species of palms which Larry brought up from California by the semi-truck load. These were mostly crated-specimens of species such as *Brahea armata/edulis* (both species are featured in Jeff's garden).

Larry and Jeff also sourced a few rare palms in small numbers (from specialty palm nurseries in the southern US) such as *Trachycarpus princeps*, now Jeff's favorite palmate palm in his garden. All in all, Jeff has about 70 palms in 23 species and hybrids. He recently added a concrete patio that compliments the shape of the garden beds. This retreat is very private and surrounded by palms and exotic plants. Jeff has observed that palm gardens continue to improve with time. He feels that his Victoria oasis is now what he first envisioned 35 years ago, and is truly hoping someone equally appreciative of his creation will enjoy the space and continue growing what he has created.

For an enjoyable digital tour of Jeff St.Gelais' exotic garden creation, visit his Website below:

<https://victoriaoasis.webs.com/>

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