

Blowin' in the wind

BY NICOLE LEVY
nicole.levy@newsday.com

The palm tree, a symbol of tropical vacations and castaway islands, may be taking root on Long Island.

In the past two years the sale of warm-weather palms as annual plants has increased by about a third at Hicks Nurseries in Westbury, said Hicks horticulturist Walt Dworkin. The "big boom," as Dworkin called it, started when the economy went south, making the staycation an appealing alternative to the equatorial getaway. Long Islanders who traveled less frequently "were fixing up their yards with things that looked tropical," Dworkin said. ". . . It gave them their vacation at home."

Cold-hardy palms have taken on new significance since superstorm Sandy, which toppled 11,000 trees in Nassau County alone, according to the county executive's office. In the Mandalay neighborhood of Wantagh, homeowner Debra Doria said she is replacing trees she lost in her backyard with five 5-foot windmill palms, trunked trees with fanlike fronds, from Roslyn-based Kokomo Trading Co.

Kokomo founder Jason Bash is selling hardy palms — at prices up to \$1,299 with installation — as insurance against the costs of future storm damage. A landscaping contractor planted the first of Bash's palms at a Syosset home Monday morning.

"Palm trees don't have branches," said Bash, who lost power at his Roslyn home for three weeks after Sandy downed neighborhood trees. Palm fronds detach more easily than branches, making the trees less likely to uproot in stormy weather, he said. "They have been designed by Mother Nature to survive hurricanes."

Laura Weill, president of the Long Island Horticulture Society, agrees. "If there's high winds . . . [palms] tend to just bend and sway," she said.

Hardy palms may survive

Some Long Islanders turn to palm trees for storm-resistant greenery



PHOTO BY HOWARD SCHNAPP

A palm tree is planted at a Woodbury home. Jason Bash, right, owner of Kokomo Trading Co., says fronds detach in stormy weather, making the trees less likely to uproot. ■ Video: newsday.com/li

hurricane winds on Long Island, but can they weather the winter chill?

Expert opinions differ. Palms grow in many different climate zones, said Michael Mauro, a horticulturist at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says Long Island is split between zones 7a and 7b, on a scale from 0, the coldest, to 12, the hottest. In the region, plants must be able to withstand temperatures as low as zero degrees Fahrenheit.

Home gardeners with palm dreams should be realistic, said Caroline Kiang, a horticulturist with the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County. "Hardy palms can only tolerate brief periods with temperatures in the 0 to 10 degrees Fahrenheit"

range. "In my opinion, it's always a good idea and safer to recommend plants are hardy at least for zone 6 to gardeners in zone 7," Kiang said in an email.

Mauro shelters the Brooklyn Botanic Garden's outdoor needle palm in the winter, usually with burlap. He has learned that hardy species dislike precipitation in cold weather.

"If the heart gets wet and temperatures dip below freezing, it could freeze," Mauro explained. Palm fronds can also burn in the winter sun when moisture escapes through the porelike stomates in their leaves.

A new hardy palm bred and grown from seed in Mattituck by Landcraft Environments, a wholesaler that

sells tropical plants to nearby nurseries, may be more resistant to Long Island winters, Landcraft co-owner Dennis Schrader said. A cross between two of the most winter-hardy trunked palms, one from the Himalayas and the other from Bulgaria, the *Trachycarpus fortunei* "Landcraft" points to the future of Bash's business: This year, Kokomo is transporting mature field-grown palms from a nursery in Florida, but he plans to set up a Long Island nursery in one or two years.

For now, most of the customers who buy Landcraft's 18-inch hardy palm saplings for as little as \$30 are, as Pam Healey, manager for Lynch's Garden Center in Southampton, said, "die-hard gardeners" who like a challenge.

AT LEAST 30 DIE IN NIGERIA SCHOOL ATTACK

BY ADAMU ADAMU AND MICHELLE FAUL
The Associated Press

POTISKUM, Nigeria — Islamic militants attacked a boarding school before dawn yesterday, dousing a dormitory in fuel and lighting it ablaze as students slept, survivors said. At least 30 people were killed in the deadliest attack yet on schools in Nigeria's embattled northeast.

Authorities blamed the violence on Boko Haram, a radical group whose name means "Western education is sacrilege." The militants have been behind a series of recent attacks on schools in the region, including one in which gunmen opened fire on children taking exams in a classroom.

"We were sleeping when we heard gunshots. When I woke up, someone was pointing a gun at me," Musa Hassan, 15, told The Associated Press of the assault on Government Secondary School in Mamudo village in Yobe state.

He put his arm up in defense, and sustained a gunshot that blew off all four fingers on his right hand, the one he uses to write. His life was spared when the militants moved on after shooting him.

Hassan recalled how the gunmen came armed with jerrycans of fuel that they used to torch the school's administrative block and one of the dormitories.

"They burned the children alive," he said, the horror showing in his wide eyes.

He and teachers at the morgue said dozens of children from the 1,200-student school escaped into the bush, but have not been seen since.

By yesterday afternoon, thousands of students had fled several boarding schools around Potiskum, leaving deserted campuses in fear of more attacks.

Former colonizer Britain condemned the "senseless atrocity," with Mark Simmonds, Minister for Africa, promising his country "will do what it can to help Nigeria tackle terrorism."

Islamic militants from Boko Haram and breakaway groups have killed more than 1,600 civilians in suicide bombings and other attacks since 2010, according to an Associated Press count.