Queen Palms: 1 of 3 not doing well

January 5

**Question:** We moved into our home in 2003. Along with other plantings, we had three queen palms in our front yard. The two outside palms are doing very well. The palm in the middle is about 6 feet shorter than the other two, and the trunk is not as large in circumference. When the palms were planted, we didn't see any difference in appearance. We do have Ixoras growing around the palms. We fertilize with a palm fertilizer. We have heard that Ixoras too close to a palm can draw nutrients away from the tree. What is your opinion?

Lee R., Cape Coral

**Answer:** All plants compete for light, water and nutrients. The successful competitor for water and nutrients is usually the one with the dominant roots. Queen palm roots are much more aggressive than those of ixoras and so the ixora roots are probably not the reason for the decline of the center palm. It's been more than four years since the palms were planted. By now, they should have become well established. It is not unusual for palms of equal stature, planted at the same time, to respond differently to the new environment. That is because at the time of planting a palm may have suffered an undetected injury or the soil may vary significantly even within several feet. Over time, those differences could significantly affect the palms and their appearances. Here are several reasons why the center palm may be lagging:

1. Injury to the palms when being dug, transported, or planted.
2. Planted too deeply.
3. Planted in an area of shallow soil
4. Planted in an area frequently saturated with water.

At this point, if you are looking for palms of equal appearance, you may consider replanting with another queen. If so, check to see that the soil depth is sufficiently deep, and that it is free-draining.

Stephen Brown is a horticulture agent with the Lee County Extension Service. Submit questions by calling the horticulture desk at 461-7504 between 9 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. or by e-mailing brownsh@leegov.com. Visit his web page at [http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/GardenHome.shtml](http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/GardenHome.shtml)  “Garden Doctor” video clips [http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/Video.shtml](http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/Video.shtml) and flowering trees information at [http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/GardenPubsA_Z.shtml](http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/GardenPubsA_Z.shtml)