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The members of the palm family are essentially tropical in distribution. They are highly ornamental in appearance, and many of them are of great economic importance. Their fruits, stems, and leaves are largely used in the manufacture of products in both Europe and America. They provide both food and shelter for thousands of the inhabitants of tropical countries.

The foliage of the palms is of two chief kinds: the fan-palm, in which the venation radiates from a common center; and the pinnate leaves (which the coconut contains), in which the venation runs from the sides of a long midrib. In this type of foliage the leaf is divided into long narrow segments.