

 ***Cycas circinalis*** 
Family: Cycadaceae

Commonly known as ‘Cycads’, they are little different from our flowering neighbours as they belong to a primitive group of plants, i.e., gymnosperms who came relatively early on this earth. Cycads are quite common ornamentals in urban gardens but one of them *Cycas circinalis* is conspicuous in the traditional diet charts. Endemic to peninsular India, this plant is distributed in the states of Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and in the south of Maharashtra. The plant is popularly named as “Queen sago palm”. The flour, prepared from the dried seed, is commonly known as “*eenthakka podi*”, a popular substitute of rice flour among the indigenous communities in Kerala. In Pathanamthitta district, endosperms are separated from seed, dried, and powdered to make flour for preparing various delicacies. Moreover, the *Kadar* tribe of Thrissur uses the underground part (“*Eenth*”) as food. *Irulas* of Pillur valley, Tamil Nadu, use the tender leaves and shoots as a vegetable (known as “*Enthu*”) in their daily food intake. The same habit is also found in Palliyar tribe of Madurai and Tirunelveli districts of Tamil Nadu, where the plant is known as “*Paareenji*”. The plant is a forest dweller therefore, naturally propagated, but habitat destruction and rampant bark extraction pushed it to the endangered category. Till date, no organized cultivation for the plant has been reported. A recent initiative is taken by CSIR-NBRI, Lucknow for Cycad species conservation in India by establishing Cycad Conservation Centre at CSIR-NBRI Botanic Garden.

