

**PLOT**

# A plant of the bygone era to adorn one's garden

**Cycads are** very hardy plants, requiring minimum attention and are ideal for low-maintenance gardens and xeriscaping



**ELEGANT LOOK:** Cycads of different shapes and sizes.

Dinosaurs are the creatures we associate with an unknown, ancient era. But Cycads, bridging the time before dinosaurs and after them up till now, are more ancient, much harder and hence fittest of the surviving species. Known as 'living fossils', they are prehistoric seed plants which first came into being around 270 million years ago, and underwent little change over the ages. What's more, they served as staple dinosaur diet!

Cycads are the members of taxonomic order Cycadales in the plant kingdom. Now about 150 species of Cycads in 11 genera of three families survive in small populations in the warm regions of several continents, and about half of the species are threatened with extinction. In India, about 10

species of Cycads (all belonging to the genus *Cycas*) grow in wild. *Cycas beddomei* (of Seshachalam hills), and *Cycas sphaerica* (which grows in parts of Chittoor, Srikakulam and Orissa) are two native endemic species (species with restricted distribution) found in Andhra Pradesh. Cycads have many unusual features like large visible seeds (not hidden inside the fruits) on large female flowering organs (called Cones or Strobili). The individual plants are either male or female. Cycads can live as long as 2,500 years. Though they look similar, Palms and Cycads are altogether different plants taxonomically and morphologically.

**Description**

Cycads vary greatly in shape and size and grow in various climatic



zones from rainforest to semi-desert. They are slow growing succulent plants with attractive foliage. Many Cycads are palm-like trees with stout cylindrical stems supporting a crown of many spirally-arranged, leathery, pinnate leaves. Male or female cones arise from the centre of the leaf rosettes. Although all parts of cycads are toxic, they can provide a food source for some communities, particularly in times of famine. The toxins are removed by careful boiling and washing before use.

**Gardening**

The elegant form of many Cycads is valued by landscapers all over the world. Especially the blue forms of Cycads are highly valued by growers and plant collectors.

Cycads can take several places in a landscape and can be used in several ways. Large paired plants can be planted in containers or in

ground flanking entrances such as gates and driveways. A single large cycad also makes an excellent specimen plant in a landscape, substituting a palm where a large crown is desired without the tall trunk. Smaller cycads can be planted in a group to give an effect of ground cover with an interesting texture. Cycads are integral part of Japanese and Zen gardens.

Cycads can be planted in small gardens where space is limited and consequently plant size is limited. A well-placed container-grown cycad can greatly enhance the garden setting. A few cycads (like certain species of *Zamia*) can thrive in the low light and dry atmosphere of indoors. These species have the added advantage of lacking spiny leaves.

Cycads are very hardy plants, requiring minimum attention and being undemanding in their soil, water and other environmental

**POPULAR GARDEN CYCADS**

Cycas circinalis
Cycas revoluta
Cycas sphaerica
Dioon edule
Dioon spinulosum
Encephalartos ferox
Encephalartos horridus
Zamia furfuracea
Zamia fischeri
Zamia floridana

needs and are ideal for the low-maintenance gardens and xeriscaping. They can sustain severe drought conditions and can also resist fire. Cycads will actually grow well in almost any soil medium provided that it is well-drained. A critical factor in growing healthy cycads is maintaining a moist but not wet soil substrate. They respond well to fertilizer and moisture during the growing season. Fertilisers with even NPK balance and supplemented trace elements included in the potting medium provide good results.

Cycads are susceptible to Scale insects, Weevils, chewing insects, larvae of many species of insects and stem rot. Being hardy, they can withstand these problems with minimum pest management practices.

**Propagation**

Cycads are propagated by fresh seeds. Some species which throw offsets can be propagated by dividing and planting the offsets.

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**BLISSFUL SLEEP**

# Mattress that is crafted for a relaxing slumber

**Magniflex promises** to give new meaning to the phrase 'Sleep like a baby', reports T. LALITH SINGH



Magniflex launches New Duoform Soft Mattress.

Magniflex, the Italian luxury mattress brand, promise to give a new meaning to the phrase 'Sleep like a baby' with the launch of its new mattress.

With the latest offering 'New Duoform Soft mattress', Magniflex guarantee that users can have a perfect balance of relaxation and blissful sleep after a long day. "The specially crafted product is custom-made using some of the finest natural materials to provide absolute relief and a relaxing slumber," the company says in a press release.

Back problems and the feeling of not having well slept are common occurrences among the working population in India. Says Anand Nichani, Director, Polyflex Group, partners for Magniflex Luxury Mattresses in India, "Sleeping on the Magniflex Duoform Soft mat-

tress is exceptionally relaxing after a long and tiring day, especially due to the mattress' ability to provide perfect cushioning for every curvature of your body that makes sure you wake up well rested."

The mattress comes with Memofoam Magnifoam which conforms to the shape of one's body using one's weight and body heat. The 3-zone system offers advanced support to the body, legs and shoulders.

At the same time, the Elioform layer provides extra orthopaedic support to the spine and it is covered with breathable Coolmax fabric, the release informs.

The mattress is available in a height of 15 cm (6 inch) and 18 cm (7 inch) with the former priced at Rs. 84,015 and the latter, Rs.1,00,614 (approximately) for a king-size mattress.

# Soothing time on a rocking chair

**The rocking chair works on the principle of 'centre of gravity', reports RASHI TIWARY**

Rocking chairs or recliners have always been a great addition to a study or a child's room. The idea of sitting back after a hard day at work or spending long nights sitting up and reading was probably the notion behind this great invention. These chairs now also find a significant presence in cafes and lounges.

The rocking chair works on the principle of 'centre of gravity'. Going by this principle, the rocking chair

enables its occupant to lean into his or her centre of gravity and they are ergonomically beneficial too. The idea of attaching curved bands called rockers to the bottom of the chair first originated in North America though the model of the rocking chair was also influenced by Greek and Roman architecture. Every year, new models are being invented, from antique rocking chairs to glider rocking chairs. Some rocking chairs are being specially devel-

oped by doctors for post-medical therapy. Whether it is grown-ups who like to read or children who like to rock back and forth for the mere thrill, rocking chairs are enjoyable for people of every age. The soothing motion of the chair is reminiscent of a mother rocking her child on her knees.

In Hyderabad, rocking chairs are available in a variety of models. A city-based interior designer reveals that great care needs to be taken

while making a rocking chair as the 'angles, the contours and dimensions have to be exact'.

At Allwyn Furnitures in Nampally, a simple teakwood rocking chair is available for Rs. 6,200 while at Khazana Furniture in Jubilee Hills, a leather cum stainless steel model is priced at Rs. 74,000. The price range is wide depending upon the material used. However, not many stores in the city have a variety to offer.

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