SOUTH AFRICA'S CYCADS

IDENTIFICATION AND LEGISLATION

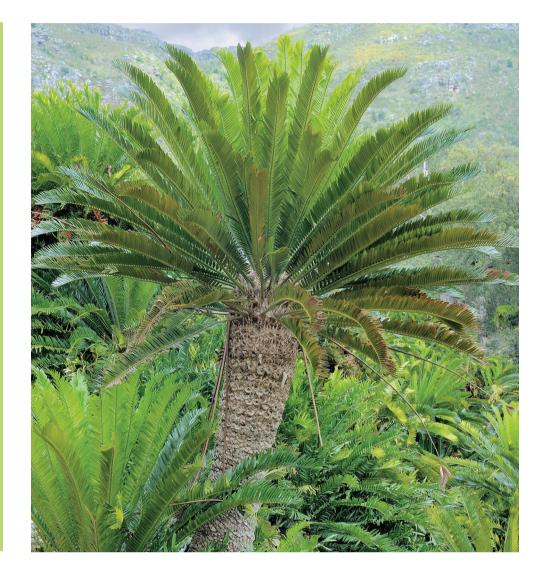
Cycads date back to the time of the dinosaurs. They are the most ancient seed plants remaining and have survived three mass extinctions in Earth's history...until now. The actions of modern humans have caused a cycad extinction crisis in South Africa.

WHAT ARE CYCADS?

Cycads are an ancient group of seed plants dating back 280 million years. They have a trunk, leaves and cones, all covered with stiff, sharp spines. They are often confused with Cycas and palms. While not as common today, they were during the Jurassic period, which is often referred to as the "Age of Cycads".

THREATS TO CYCADS IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa is a hotspot for cycad diversity with 38 indigenous species (over 10% of the world's cycads). Thirty seven of these species belong to the genus Encephalartos of which more than 70% face extinction. Illegal harvesting from the wild is the most significant threat to indigenous cycad species and is driven by the local and international demand for plants to use in private gardens and collections.



CYCADS AND THE LAW

According to national environmental legislation, the trade in cycads taken out of the wild is prohibited. The following national laws regulate biodiversity and provide protection for various species, including cycads:

- National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act 10 of 2004 (NEMBA), read with
- Threatened or Protected Species (TOPS) Regulations, 2007,
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Regulations 2010.
 CITES applies when listed species are subject to import or export related activities and this includes specimens, parts and derivatives of all cycad species.

National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act 57 of 2003 (NEMPAA), protects all biodiversity in protected areas.

Each province also has conservation laws to further potect and regulate cycad trade.

OBTAINING CYCADS LEGALLY

There are legal methods of obtaining and keeping artificially propagated cycads. If you are in possession of an indigenous cycad, or if you purchase a cycad, you need to obtain a permit. This will help to protect these threatened species from illegal trade. If you are in possession of an exotic cycad, you may not need a permit. To find out what the requirements are for your area, or if you have any other queries, please refer to the relevant contact details below. contact the relevant department below.

IS IT A CYCAD?

South Africa is home to numerous Encephalartos species, each with its own distinct features. Encephalartos Cycads are often confused with palms and tree ferns and can be difficult to identify Here's how to check if you have an Encephalartos cycad in your garden. If you are still unsure or have any other queries, please refer to the relevant contact details below

When identifying Encephalartos cycad species in South Africa, the following key features are commonly considered:

TRUNK

Encephalartos Cycads have cylindrical trunks that do not usually branch. The trunk may be buried with the leaves appearing to be emerging from the ground.



Encephalartos trunks have spirals of relatively smooth diamond-shaped leaf



trunk with diamond-shaped leaf scars

LEAVES

Encephalartos leaves grow directly from the trunk in a whorled formation, and typically fall as they get older, leaving a crown of newer leaves at the top.

Leaves have leaflets arranged on either side of the stem.



Encephalartos leaflets have sunken, parallel veins and no mid vein. If there is a mid vein, it is not an Encephalartos species.

Leaflets are hard and prickly and don't bend easily. They may be green, blue-green, or grey.



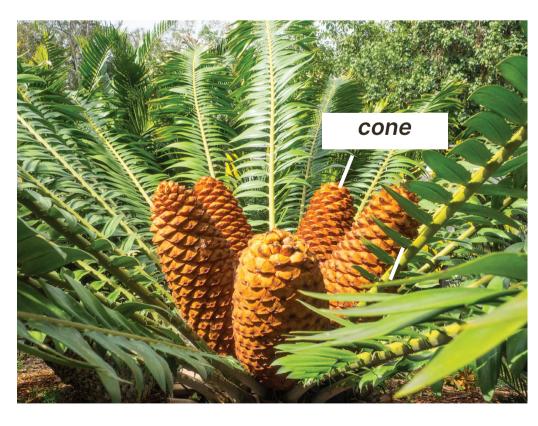
Leaflets are always narrower closer to the stem and are clearly smaller closer to the base, which is thornless.



leaflet tapering

PLANT REPRODUCTION

If the plants are in reproductive condition, there is no possibility of confusing them with palms because cycads bear large, conspicuous cones but no flowers, whereas palms bear small inconspicuous flowers.



NATIONAL CONTACT DETAILS FOR INFORMATION AND PERMITS

The Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment

DFFE-TOPS & CITES Permits
The EWT Wildlife in Trade Programme

General enquiries: Switch board:

012 399 8818

086 111 2468

012 399 9000

witinfo@ewt.org.za

PROVINCIAL CONTACTS

Eastern Cape
Free State
Gauteng
KwaZulu-Natal
Limpopo

045 808 4000 N 051 404 9600 N 011 240 3184 N 033 845 1654 N 015 297 3839

 Mpumalanga
 013 065 0627

 Northern Cape
 087 630 0387

 North West
 018 389 5093

 Western Cape
 021 483 0121

Report cycad theft to the National Environmental Crimes and Incidents Hotline

0800 205 005

