

HOW TO IDENTIFY A CYCAD

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.

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. According to national environmental legislation, the trade in cycads taken out of the wild is prohibited.

However, 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. Cycads are often confused with palms and tree ferns, and indigenous cycads are difficult to differentiate from exotic cycads. 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.

Plant shape



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.

Trunks have spirals of relatively smooth diamond-shaped leaf scars.



diamond-shaped leaf scars

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.



cone

Encephalartos cycad 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



mid vein

Exotic



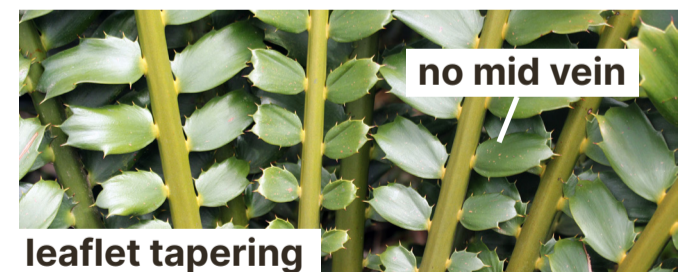
no mid vein

Encephalartos

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.



no mid vein

leaflet tapering

Contact details for more information or to obtain permits

The Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment

DFFE-TOPS & CITES Permits

The EWT Wildlife in Trade Programme

General enquiries: 086 111 2468

Switch board: 012 399 9000

012 399 8818

witinfo@ewt.org.za

Provincial contacts

Eastern Cape 045 808 4000

Free State 051 404 9600

Gauteng 011 240 3184

KwaZulu-Natal 033 845 1654

Limpopo 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



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