

satisfactorily in those institutes, the scientists have to handle several disease-causing organisms, which may not appeal to women scientists, explaining their lower participation in these institutes. Women scientists from bigger cities are likely to be reluctant to accept jobs in the regional centres away from important metropolitan cities and in centres where dangerous pathogens are handled or extensive field work is required. This

explains their relatively sparse representation in those institutes. It may be concluded that women scientists in ICMR do not face the problem of a 'glass ceiling'. It is expected that in course of time they will equal the number of male counterparts or outnumber them in these august institutions.

1. Sinha, U. B. and Sinha, D., *Curr. Sci.*, 2011, **100**(6), 837–840.

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Planting cycas

Landscaping and garden designing nowadays is professionally managed by companies. Residential and commercial landscapings (hotels and hospitals, institutions, parks and private residences) bring aesthetically pleasing extension of indoor living to the outdoors. However, some traditionally grown plants are replaced with some evergreen plants. Traditional wisdom of growing which plant to grow near the prayer hall, hospital or residential area is not given importance. Cycas is traditionally not cultivated as a household plant, now we see it in all the gardens. It is even commercially grown in nurseries and marketed at Rs 500–1000 per plant. Cycas is a gymnosperm – naked



Cycas plant.

seeded plant. Its history can be traced back to Mesozoic era. It is called as a 'living fossil' as it looks like its fossil ancestor. It has practically not shown any modification during this long geological period. It is sluggish in its growth and is dioecious. Male and female plants are separate. Cycas is represented in species like *Cycas circinalis*, *Cycas revoluta*, *Cycas beddomei*, *Cycas rumphaii* and *Cycas pectinata*. Of these, *C. circinalis* and *C. revoluta* are cultivated as ornamental garden plants. The plant is, no doubt, good to look at with its evergreen leaves. When it starts producing cones, male cones are fairly big and compact. It has a number of microsporophylls which bear microsporangia on its abaxial (lower) surface in groups. Each microsporangium has thousands of spores which are boat shaped. Each cone produces pollen grains, microspores in billions. The plant is mainly wind pollinated. It emits most disagreeable smell. The spores affect the lungs, and is bad for asthma patients. Hence, it is not advisable to grow it in private gardens, hospitals, libraries or laboratory buildings. However, it can be grown in public gardens where people sit for a while and go. It produces seeds rich in starch and is

used as food. But its continuous use may lead to digestive disorders. It is difficult to know the sex of the plant before cone formation. However, Shetty and Subramanyan¹ showed that the cytological studies are helpful in determining the sex. We suggest that the Cycas should not be grown near the hospitals, laboratories, libraries, ashramas in private or personal gardens. But it can be grown safely in public gardens. In Indonesia it is grown in graveyards.

1. Shetty, B. V. and Subramanyan, K., *Proc. Indian Sci. Congr. Assoc.*, 1962, pt 3, p. 259.

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Reintroducing the cheetah in India's grassland – glamour or conservation?

Among the wild cats, cheetah is unique and is the only extant member of the genus *Acinonyx* notable with its non-retractable claws and pads. This fast-running cat derived its name from Sanskrit, *citrakayah*, meaning, the spotted. Like the lion, the cheetah came to India from south-western

Asia by the way of north-western passes, and established in the plains of northern and central parts stretching south up to the Deccan and Mysore¹. Recent genetic study indicates that the last common ancestor of all existing cheetah populations lived in Asia about 11 million years ago².

The fascinating cheetah or hunting leopard was indeed hunted to extinction in the wild in 1952. According to Prater¹, the last authentic record of the cheetah hunting in India was of three males shot together at Bastar District in Madhya Pradesh in 1948.