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Cycas

Cycadaceae

Cycas is derived from Greek *kykas* (a kind of palm – which species in this genus are not). These palm-like species in the *Cycadaceae* family are often referred to by botanists as ‘living fossils’ as they note that their form has changed little in 200 million years and are believed to be the oldest known seed plants.

Today some of these plants are so valuable that they are vulnerable to theft (even involving firearms). In 1995 the Kirstenbosch Botanic Garden in South Africa displayed an especially rare cycad species to the Chelsea Flower Show in England and as a safeguard the plant contained a microchip. Then in 2003 authorities noted that this practice was being extended in South Africa to wild cycads generally as a means of tracing their movement and to distinguish between wild and cultivated traded plants. From the turn of the 20th and 21st Centuries the wild plants were being progressively threatened with extinction because of local harvesting for food, and urban and agricultural demands for land, as well as a legal trade catering to a fashion for cycads in an ornamental capacity (predominantly in Germany, the Netherlands and the United States) which relied upon collection of wild seed (thus undermining natural reproduction cycles) and mature plants.