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Cycas circinalis

[Synonyms : *Cycas circinalis* var. *swamyii*, *Cycas rumphii*, *Cycas undulata*, *Cycas wallichii*]
FALSE SAGO PALM is a palm-like, evergreen plant. It is native to Asia (particularly Indonesia and the Philippines).

It is also known as *Canningay* (Tamil), Crozier cycad, *Cykas indický* (Czech), Fern palm, *Intalappana* (Malayalam), *Jangli-madan-mast-ka-phul* (Hindi), *Kamkshi* (Telugu), *Maprao tao* (Thai), *Pakis aji* (Javanese), *Paku badak* (Sundanese), *Paku laut* (Malay), Queen sago, Sago, Sago palm, Sago plant, Sago plant of Sri Lanka, Sagou palm, and *Varaguna* (Sanskrit).

The seeds yield small whitish, pinkish, or brownish grains of starch (sago).

Warning – raw seeds, raw root, trunk pith and pollen are poisonous and can affect the central nervous system. They must be processed before being eaten. Eaten to excess it can cause intestinal disorders. The plants can be poisonous for animals.

Circinalis means ‘coiled, or coiled inwards (like a young fern frond)’.

The seeds are pounded and soaked, with repeated changes of water, to produce a form of flour (sometimes sunbaked for later use) which has been used widely for food for centuries in Asia, especially in times of shortage. It has been familiar in Europe since the time of the Renaissance. For Europe and North America it was one of the most popular forms of starch used for cooking by the end of the 17th Century and, as well as acting as a thickening agent in broth, was even used in making soft rolls.

Sago can be made from the trunk pith or core. Apparently a 4 ft. length can yield 5 lb. of the floury substance.

The leaves have been eaten as a vegetable in Malaysia.

False sago palm was also familiar to the Australian Aborigines long before the British landed on their Continent. They consumed the roasted seeds that, before cooking, had been rigorously washed.

Now in the West sago’s culinary use tends to be limited to that of a thickening agent and an ingredient in puddings. Whereas Indian cookery uses ‘sago’ (from a related species) for a dessert jelly, and Indonesian cookery uses it as a paste for fritters, cakes, etc.

Medicinally, the bark and seeds have been included in poultices applied to sores and swellings.