

Indigenous

Trade name: Cycad.

Common names: **English:** Cycad.

Ecology: This plant belongs to a primitive group of woody plants, with separate male and female plants, the latter having large cones and big seeds. Over 20 rare endemics are found in South Africa and a few in East Africa. One of 5 Kenyan species, *E. hilderbrandtii* grows only at the coast. In Uganda the species is very rare and threatened, restricted to Mpanga river in Kabarole District and south of Kakira sugar plantations on the Jinja-Tororo road.

Uses: Ornamental, ceremonial (cones), thatching (leaves).

Description: A **palm-like tree** which can reach 6-9 m but more often the crown is low on the ground. The trunk may be over 2 m round and is marked with leaf scars. **LEAVES:** a crown of dark green very **stiff pinnate leaves**, each one 1-3 m (white-woolly when young), with 60-80 pairs leaflets **one-sided at the base**, lower leaflets smaller. The **leaflet has 3 spiny lobes at the tip and 6-9 sharp teeth along the edge**. **FLOWERS:** cones arise in the centre between the ring of leaves. Several stalked male cones grow together, long and thin about 25 cm long and 10 cm across, green becoming dull red. **Female cones have no stalk and look like pineapples to 60 cm high and 25 cm across, usually 3 together**. Green at first, they turn orange-yellow and the cone scales burst open to reveal **seeds** which fall out. Each one is **oblong to 3 cm long with edible bright orange flesh**.

Propagation: Wildings are obtained easily from suckers but rather difficult from seeds. For a female cone to be fertilized the male plant and cone must be near each other. Seed may develop but will be infertile. Seedlings can also be raised in pots.

Seed: Ripe seed should be collected from mature female cones then dried and sown.

treatment: soaking in water for 24 hours will hasten germination.

storage: store in sealed containers in a cool place. Add ash to reduce insect damage.

Management: Slow growing.

Remarks: Cycad is one of the oldest plants still living, sometimes called a living fossil. Wildings fetch extremely high prices; for example, in the US in 1975 a wilding the size of a football was selling at \$25,000. Thus it has a potential for export. A different species occurs near Moyo town in Kitgum District. The hard seed can be boiled and ground into flour in times of famine. The starchy centre of the stem is also edible.

