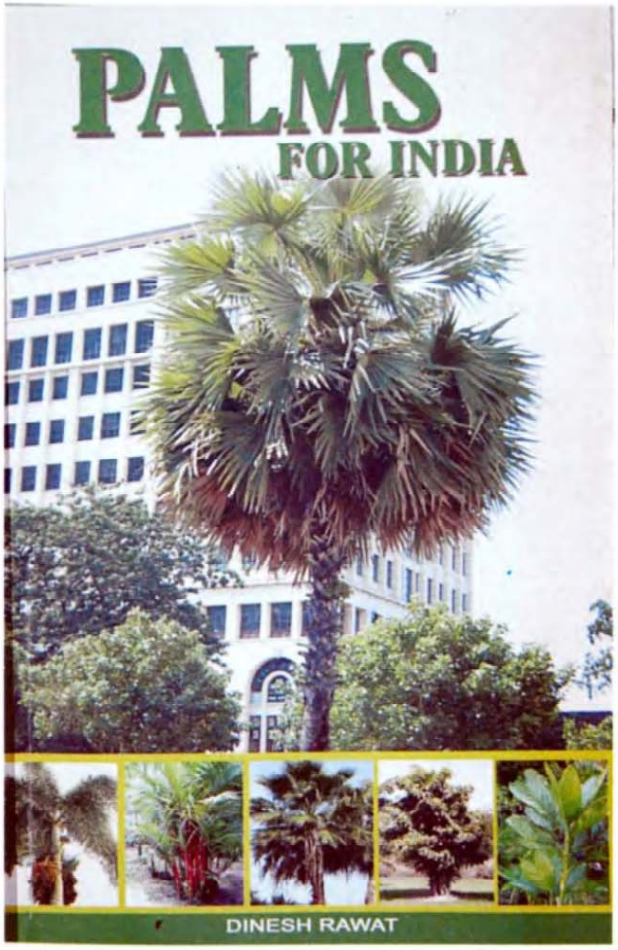
BOOK REVIEW

PALMS FOR INDIA Dinesh Rawat, published by Sahayog Hortica (P) Ltd. Bakhrahat Road, Sampukpota, 24 Parganas (S), West Bengal – 743 503, India. 2008. 135 pp, all coloured on art paper. Paper back edition. Price: Rs.290.00 (India) US $ 15.00 (other countries).



Palms are one of the most well-known and extensively cultivated plants. Many common products and foods are derived from palms, and palms are also widely used in landscaping for their exotic appearance, making them one of the most economically important group. In many historical cultures, palms were symbols for such ideas as victory, peace, and fertility.

Palms are a vital component in everyday lives of people in India. Their reference in vedic scriptures on the one hand and fossil records on the other bear testimony to antiquity of Palms. They are mentioned more than 30 times in the Bible and at least 22 times in the Quran.

The aesthetic value of palms is no less important than their traditional and commercial values. There are roughly 202 genera with around 2600 species in the world, most of which are restricted to tropical, subtropical, and possibly warm temperate climates. In India 21 genera and about 100 species of palms occur in three major geographical regions, *viz*. Peninsular India, North Eastern India and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. A small number of palms are represented in the Gangetic plains and in the lower hill valleys of Northern India.

Palm populations in the wild are decreasing. Many palms are restricted in distribution and the destruction of their natural habitats is affecting the growth of their population. Many palm species are over exploited for their products. Some inherent characteristics of palms such as monocarpic nature, poor germination of seeds and poor establishment of seedlings etc. have also contributed to the retardation of natural regeneration of palms. In the absence of concrete efforts towards their replenishment, some of these wild palms are likely to face the threat of extinction, e.g., *Trachycarpus takil, Corypha taliera,* etc. But palms have often been ignored or poorly collected and studied by field botanists because collection and herbarium preparation of this group are very difficult. The study of palms in the gardens and natural habitats is the only option left for the serious workers.

The present hand book on '**Palms for India**' has been well illustrated with colour photographs of live plants and published at an affordable price. The book provides information on 212 species and varieties belonging to 81 genera which according to author can be planted in different habitats in India.

Since the cultivation of palms differs from other ornamentals, it is imperative to know about their identity, morphology, planting and growing techniques and the hand book provides basic information on all these aspects.

Introductory chapters guide one through the seed collection to transplantation of palms and provide interesting and useful information about why palms are becoming so popular, propagation of palms through

seed germination, collection and viability of palm seeds labeling, cleaning and pre-treatment of seeds, process of germination, preparation of seed beds and media, protection of seeds during germination process, propagation by division, selection of potting mix, pots and fertilizers for palm seedlings and how to transplant a grown up palm. Structure of palm has been explained for non-botanists, but serious students will find it inadequate and those who need to know more details should have been provided with at least a list of references

For each species scientific names (including phonetics), common name. along with a colour photograph, details like the normal height of palm, whether single stand or clustering, size, colour and description of fruit, shape structure and colour of leaf, preferred soil, sunlight requirement, water required, humidity, suitable temperature, origin of species, pot culture and ground information have been provided. But scientific names are incomplete as they are without the author citation. It would have been better to add author citation with the scientific name of each palm.

Some of the palms which are already in cultivation in india like *Lodoicea maldivica* (Gmelin) Pers. have been missing from the book. This palm has a distinction of having the largest seed in the plant kingdom. The mature fruit is 40-50 cm in diameter and weighs 15-30 kg. Some of the Indian palms like *Pinanga andamanensis* Becc. and *Pinanga mannii* Becc. are rare and threatened in the wild. Bringing them under the cultivation may help us in conserving them. Similar species should have been highlighted to focus on their planting by palm lovers.

For horticulturists and gardeners lists of species with different categories have been provided at the end. It includes Palms with spines (19 spp.) clustering palms (45 spp.), drought tolerant (19 spp.), water loving (53 spp.), fast growing (32 spp.), very slow growing (24 spp.), suitable for hedges and screening (51 spp.), small species up to 7 ft (21 spp.), palms suitable for indoors (64 spp.), large species over 40 ft (57 spp.) saline soil/salt tolerant (33 spp.), heat tolerant species over 38 - 45° C (55 spp.), cold tolerant species 10 - 0° C, (37 spp.), full sun loving (131 spp.), and shade loving (56 spp.).

This hand book will fill the long felt need for such popular title and all palm lovers, botanists, horticulturists and landscapers will welcome this publication as it will be of great utility to all of them, both at home and abroad.

M. Sanjappa & P. Singh
Botanical Survey of India
Kolkata