

# Gene pool to preserve Kutch's indigenous dates

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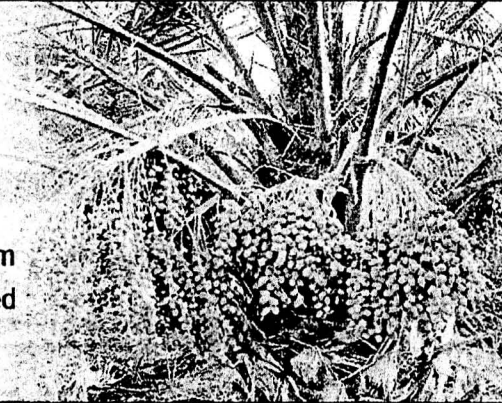
**Rajkot:** Date Palm Research Centre (DPRC) in Mundra has set up India's first field gene bank with an aim to preserve the famed Kutchi dates.

Kutch is the biggest date palm producer in India and according to latest figures, the region produces 1.80 lakh tonnes dates annually.

The cultivation is spread on 17,000 hectares. However, rapid industrialization, pollution and climate change pose a potential threat to several varieties and agriculture scientists fear that these may get extinct if not preserved properly through genetic

## PRESERVATION CRITERIA

- Should be early maturing fruits
- Should be naturally sweet
- Red in colour
- Minimum weight of each fruit to be 20-25 gram
- Should be medium sized
- Should be from good yielding crop



engineering.

The 1998 Kandla cyclone had ravaged thousands of date palms across Kutch. Moreover, the rapid industrialization in Kutch in last two decades has resulted in vast tracts

of agriculture land getting converted into the industrial zones.

Talking to TOI, CM Muralidharan, research scientist at DPRC, said, "The number of date varieties is vast. We

## Diversity in varieties

The indigenous dates are the monopoly of the Kutch but there is diversity in its varieties. Date palms are dioecious crop. This means that male and female seeds are found in different palms. Around 40 to 50 percent seedlings are female. Around 90 percent of plantations in Kutch are cultivated from these seeds. In this process, however, the new palm may not have the qualities of the mother palm. It also loses the surety of yielding red dates only, leading to diversity in colour and taste. TNN

have already created clones of 200 varieties over the last three years and are adding more varieties. We identify the varieties that are strong and clone them."

Kutch produces dates that are red, yellow and green and there are various sizes of the fruit too.

During the process of cultivation, scientists identify certain rare characters in plants which are rare but natural and that can be used in future genetic engineering. In future, they can even create a total new variety from the gene bank using biotechnology.