

Natural History Snippets

An introduced palm, *Areca triandra*, is becoming invasive in the wet zone

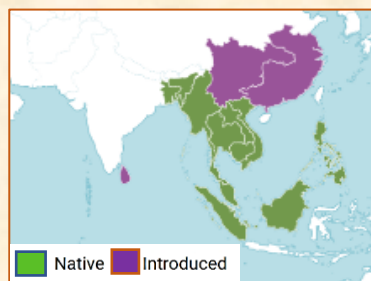


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This palm now occurs in dense populations, and is displacing indigenous species, threatening small forest pockets in the high biodiverse wet lowlands of Sri Lanka. It is often confused with the critically endangered and endemic *Areca concinna* (Lentheri මල්කිනි) due to similar morphological features.

A. concinna is found only in a couple of locations in the Kalutara District.

A. triandra was introduced to Sri Lanka in 1867 to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Peradeniya, and popularly cultivated as an ornamental. It is native to Northwest India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaya, Borneo, Sumatra, and Philippines. It is now naturalized in China, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, Hawaii-Pacific region, and Sri Lanka.



Some of the characters that enable this palm to proliferate and become widely dispersed are shown at left.



Clumps with clustering stems



High seedling population



Dispersal by frugivores (Koel, Hornbill, Green Imperial Pigeon)



High fruit production - infructescence with 100 to 400 bright red fruits

Flora of Sri Lanka. Available at: <https://www.floraofsri Lanka.com/>



Palms belong to the family *Arecaceae*, previously known as *Palmae*. They are *Monocots* and perhaps one of the most diverse groups of plants. Palms are familiar to us because of their usefulness, and the best known among these are the *Coconut (Cocos nucifera)*, *Kithul (Caryota urens)* and *palmyrah (Borassus flabellifer)*.

Arecaceae in Sri Lanka is represented by both native and widely cultivated and naturalized species. The native palm flora comprises 7 genera and 16 species. One genus *Loxococcus* (*Dothalu*) and 10 species including *Areca concinna*, 6 *Calamus* species and *Oncosperma fasciculatum* are endemic to the Island.

*De Zoysa, N., (2000). A Revised Handbook to the Flora of Ceylon, Vol XIV. 33-93 and 18 plates. (M. D. Dassanayake, and Clayton Ed).

*De Zoysa, N (1996) Specific recommendation for Sri Lanka in Palms their conservation and Sustained Utilization (Dennis Johnson Ed.), IUCN /SSC Palm specialist group.