

Centre to promote dragon fruit cultivation in 50,000 hectares

July 14, 2022

In news-Following the **footsteps of the Gujarat and Haryana Governments**, the Centre has recently decided to promote the cultivation of dragon fruit, known as a “super fruit” for its health benefits.

Key updates-

- The Centre feels that considering the cost effectiveness and global demand for the fruit due to its nutritional values, its cultivation can be expanded in India.
- **At present, this exotic fruit is cultivated in 3,000 hectares;** the plan is to increase cultivation to 50,000 hectares in five years.
- The Centre will assist States in providing good quality planting materials to farmers. It can also **provide specific target-based help to States and farmers under the Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH).**
- The **Gujarat Government recently renamed dragon fruit as kamlam (lotus)** and announced an incentive for farmers who cultivate it.
- The **Haryana Government also provides a grant for farmers** who are ready to plant this exotic fruit variety.
- The Centre plans to come up with an annual action plan to motivate more State governments.
- At the moment, **Mizoram tops among the States that cultivate this fruit.**
- **India is now importing about 15,491 tonnes of dragon fruits** and has potential to match the production of China, where cultivation of the fruit takes place in

40,000 hectares, and Vietnam, which grows the fruit in 60,000 hectares. The export of the fruit has made a huge contribution to Vietnam's GDP.

What is dragon fruit?

- It is the **fruit of a species of wild cactus indigenous to South and Central America, where it is called pitaya** or pitahaya. It grows in all kinds of soil, and does not require much water.
- **Pitaya's flesh is usually white or red**, although there is a less common yellow pitaya too and is studded with tiny seeds rather like the kiwifruit.
- **Pitaya usually refers to fruit of the genus Stenocereus**, while pitaya or dragon fruit refers to fruit of the genus Hylocereus, both in the family Cactaceae.
- Seeds grow well in a compost or potting soil mix – even as a potted indoor plant.
- **This fruit can be cultivated in degraded and rainfed land.** All the States in India except cold areas are suitable for dragon fruit plants.
- **Vietnam is the world's largest producer and exporter of dragon fruit**, the Dragon fruit plant was brought by the French in the 19th century.
- **It is called thanh long in Vietnam**, which translates to **"dragon's eyes"**, believed to be the origin of its common English name.
- This fruit is also cultivated in Latin America (native here), Thailand, Taiwan, China, Australia, Israel, and Sri Lanka.
- **It was brought to India in the 1990s, and is grown in Karnataka, Kerala**, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Odisha, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Health benefits of Dragon Fruit-

- The fruit is considered **good for diabetic patients(help lower one's blood sugar)**, low in calories, fat-free, high in fiber **and high in nutrients like iron, calcium, potassium and zinc.**
- It is **rich in antioxidants** like flavonoids, phenolic acid, and betacyanin.
- These natural substances **protect your cells from damage by free radicals.**
- It also **contains prebiotics**, which are foods that feed the healthy bacteria called probiotics in one's gut.
- It **can also strengthen immune system, because it is high in vitamin C .**