



Dragon Fruit

Why in News

In June 2021, India exported its first consignment of **dragon fruit** from a farmer of Maharashtra to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates.

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Key Points

▪ About:

◦ Introduction:

- The **dragon fruit (*Hylocereus undatus*)** is **indigenous to the Americas**. It is a member of the **cacti family**.
- It is also known as '**Pitaya**', '**Pitahaya**', **strawberry pear**, **noblewoman** and **queen of the night** throughout the world. In India, it is also known as '**Kamalam**'.

◦ Climatic Condition:

- It is hardy and grows in **diverse climatic conditions** with varied soils, especially in the **semi-arid** and **arid regions** of India.
- It prefers **slightly acidic soil** and **can tolerate some salts** in soil too.
- Flowering and fruiting of dragon fruits **coincide with the monsoon season** in India (June to November).

◦ Features:

- Its **flowers are hermaphrodites** (male and female organs in the same flower) in nature and open at night.
- The plant sustains yield for more than 20 years, is **high in nutraceutical properties** (having medicinal effects) and good for **value-added processing industries**.
- It is a **rich source** of **vitamins** and **minerals**.

▪ Popularity in India:

- The dragon fruit was **introduced to home gardens in India in the 1990s**.
- The **low maintenance** and **high profitability** of dragon fruits has attracted the farming community throughout India.
- This has led to a **steep increase in dragon fruit cultivation** in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Gujarat and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, as well as in many north eastern states.
- The country **produces approximately 12,000 tonnes of the fruit** every year.

▪ **Related Issues:**

- **High Investment:** Dragon fruit is a climber that needs support and hence farmers **need to invest around Rs. 3.5 lakh per acre in infrastructure**.

- **Drip irrigation** also adds cost to the initial investment.

- **Issues in Flowering:** Generally, **sunburn** is a common problem in semi-arid and arid tracts and it can be managed by providing 25-30% shade either by **planting shade-providing trees** (such as moringa, sesbania and Melia dubia) or **installing artificial shade nets** during the harsh summer months.

▪ **Government Initiatives:**

- The Government of Maharashtra has taken the initiative to promote dragon fruit cultivation in different areas of the state by **providing good quality planting material** and **subsidies** for its cultivation through the **Mission on Integrated Development of Horticulture** (MIDH).
- MIDH is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** for the holistic growth of the horticulture sector covering fruits, vegetables, root & tuber crops, mushrooms, spices, flowers, aromatic plants, coconut, cashew, cocoa and bamboo.
 - The **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare** is implementing MIDH with effect from 2014-15.

Source: DTE

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