

CORRESPONDENCE

(1.05%)⁶ and *Raphanus raphanistrum* (0.53%)³.

None of the cotyledonary leaves showed any sign of external distortion or splitting and were arranged symmetrically in a whorl. Seedlings bearing three cotyledons also bear three true leaves at each internode of the first few internodes (Figure 1). Plants with three cotyledons are potentially useful for faster establishment of seedlings after planting because of the larger leaf area in the early growing stages and may serve as a morphological characteristics for distinguishing cultivars⁷.

Limited number of seedlings are available at the Defence Institute of High Altitude Research, Leh-Ladakh for five years. Recipients of cuttings have been asked to make appropriate recognition of

the source of the germplasm if it is used in research studies, development of a new cultivar, germplasm, parental line or hybrid.

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Has *Dracunculus* really been eradicated?

Dracunculus medinensis (guinea worm), a nematode endoparasite, has been known since biblical times and had been endemic in India, Pakistan, West and Central Africa, and the Middle East¹. Rajasthan was severely affected by dracunculiasis, especially southern Rajasthan (Dungarpur, Banswara and Udaipur districts) and was hyperendemic about two decades ago^{2,3}. The alarming status of the guinea worm led to the launching of the SWACH project by the government in 1986. This project assured proper sanitation and supply of clean and hygienic potable water to the residents of *Dracunculus* endemic areas and, as expected, it was a huge success. Owing to the success of the

SWACH project, a decade later the State Government declared Rajasthan rid off *Dracunculus*⁴. But, as we know every species struggles for its existence and so did *Dracunculus*. Not much later, i.e. in 2002 and 2003 two cases of dracontiasis were reported from Dungarpur and Banswara districts^{5,6}. Choubisa⁷ reported the third case of guinea worm in a 40-yr-old tribal subject from Rajasthan (Figure 1). Recently, two more instances from the villages of Rajasthan were reported in the press⁸.

The recurrence of *Dracunculus* in a so called '*Dracunculus*-free state' is questionable. In its strive for existence, *Dracunculus* has possibly found some new reservoir or intermediate host like monkeys and dogs that share their habitat with humans, and may spread the infection by contaminating the drinking water sources that are generally open, or step wells in the villages^{9–11}. Another probability can be migration of these residents to other adjoining endemic states as Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh for earning their livelihood and in turn getting the infection. *Dracunculus* appears to have succeeded in maintaining its gene pool despite of so many efforts of the humans to eradicate it or rather cause its extinction.

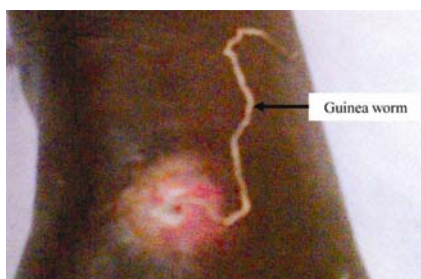


Figure 1. Guinea worm from a shallow ulcer in the foot of a 40-yr-old man (source: Choubisa)⁷.

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