

A slice of forest in the backyard

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@ T'Puram

MR Hari wakes up to the chirping of crickets these days. It has replaced the jarring sound of quarrying that used to disturb the serenity of the area a couple of years ago. Hari has in all practical purpose a 'forest' on the premises of his house at Puliyaikonam in Thiruvananthapuram. Apart from crickets, there are around 35 insect varieties in his forest. Sacred figs, tamarind trees which are 15-18 feet tall are among 70 varieties of plant species in 3 cents of his property.

As the first resident in the district to grow a forest patch using the methods of Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki, he says the concept of micro forest in urban landscape is gaining currency. "The green patch has slowly started to give the feel of a forest. People are keenly observing the change and I am sure they will be ready to spare 1 cent of land in 3-4 years to get this feeling," says Hari, managing director of Invis Multimedia.

The State Tourism Department has taken a cue from Hari and started a similar forest in Kanakakkunnu Palace Grounds on 5 cents of land, six months

ago. It now has a bio-diversity haven containing 64 plant species. Nature's Green Guardians Foundation is maintaining the patch for 3 years. "People who visit the 'forest' are keen on having one in their backyard. Even high-rise apartments can keep a small space aside for Miyawaki forest," said director of Nature's Green Guardians Foundation P S Hari. He said his organisation is ready to train students in creating mini forests in schools.

"Even if it is planting 4 or 5 trees in available space it should be encouraged. The rest of the trees will come," said former member of Kerala Biodiversity Board and director of Salim Ali Foundation V S Vijayan. According to environmentalist Anitha Sharma, "As trees are cut from pavements, it is important to conserve them inside compounds if the city is to enjoy the benefits of trees." Social Forestry has plans to provide a steady supply of tree saplings by setting up centralised nurseries in each district. "There is a good demand for tree saplings throughout the year. We are planning to provide tree saplings of two-year growth which have a higher survival chance," said Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Social Forestry, E Pradeep Kumar.



Six-month-old saplings at Miyawaki forest grown in Kanakakkunnu Palace ground in Thiruvananthapuram | B P DEEPU