

A growing fondness for wild veggies that spring up in Western Ghats forests

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KOLHAPUR: Environmental conservationist Anil Chougule from Kolhapur is busy on weekdays not wandering in the forest or addressing workshops but busy cooking wild vegetables to be delivered to those aware of their nutritional benefits.

For several years, Chougule with the help of some NGOs holds an exhibition of wild vegetables every October. Last year, he displayed over 150 such vegetables, tubers, trees and fruits. He also showed the visitors how to cook them.

"Many didn't have the time to grow or cook them in their gardens. They called me to order cooked wild vegetables to relish over the weekends. I will set up a team of women who will train to cook them to meet the growing number of orders," Chougule said.

These wild vegetables grow in the monsoon without fertilizers or pesticides. They are in abundance in the ghat areas of Kolhapur district and people stroll out every day to pluck them as they cannot afford tomatoes, okra and other vegetables. In urban areas, many have turned to growing some of these wild vegetables in their gardens.

Anjali Utturkar, a resident of Shamnagar in Kolhapur, said, "Patri is a favourite. We started growing it some years ago and I get to see the vegetable in the markets now. It is rich in minerals and our relatives from the rural areas add it to their regular diet during the monsoon."

Shahaji Kurane, a botanist based in Rashiwade village in Radhanagari tehsil, guides people about cultivating wild vegetables to conserve them. .

Kurane said that wild tubers like karanda are seasonal while the wild leafy vegetables grown perennially. "In recent years, kena, karanda, aghada and navali are cultivated on a small scale. People who live in the ghats have knowledge about how to grow rare vegetables which we city-dwellers need to learn," he added.