

# Herbal garden thrives on government land in Coimbatore outskirts

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COIMBATORE: Set up four years ago, the herbal garden at Viraliyur on the outskirts of the city has withstood the adverse climatic conditions and grown into a landmark today.

Situated in an area frequented by cattle, wild boars and wild elephants, the credit for maintaining the garden intact goes to Vellimalaipattinam village panchayat officials, who set up the same on government land, which they retrieved from encroachers.

The herbal garden, which was set up under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, today houses more than 160 trees such as vilvum, kalyana murungai, sarakondrai, illupai and thandrikai.

Pointing out that 13 acres of government land in the area was in the illegal possession of farmers for decades together, M Marappan, panchayat secretary, said they had retrieved it four years ago. “We decided to use two acres of it for setting up a herbal garden. There was an initial hesitation as it required proper maintenance and adequate water. But when we weighed the benefits, we decided to go ahead. The idea was to generate revenue by producing medicines using the tree leaves, bark and roots, besides creating a healthy environment.”

The officials then consulted experts to know the types of herbal trees that could be grown in Coimbatore soil and climate. “Later, 10 varieties of trees were selected and the saplings were purchased from Tiruvannamalai district. We spent just Rs1.21

lakh to set up the garden,” the panchayat secretary said.

He said they were using only compost that was made out of dried leaves as manure to the trees. “All the trees are grown in organic manner. We have set up rainwater harvesting structures. We have also set up several pits to produce manure by letting dried leaves decompose in them.”

Marappan said they were maintaining the garden with the help of villagers, as there wasn’t any separate fund to maintain the trees a year after planting them. “The villagers are cultivating short-term crops such as tomatoes, ladies finger, coriander and palak in about 20 cents land.”

V M Saaminathan, 58, who is helping the panchayat maintain the trees, said they were taking care of the garden as it was their own.

Marappan said they were mulling the option of setting up a clinic in the garden by roping in specialized siddha practitioners. “We are yet to submit a proposal in this regard to the state government. As elephant movement is witnessed in the region, we are now looking for a sponsor to set up solar fence around the garden.”

The entire area boasts a thick green cover. Adjacent to the herbal garden, the panchayat has planted more than 1,000 trees on six acres under the massive tree plantation programme. A few meters away, on the banks of Kulathegounder pond, officials have planted guava trees, pomegranate trees, mango trees and banana plants. Some of them have started bearing fruits.