

## Miyawaki forests are no substitute for natural ones: Experts

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Miyawaki is used to justify cutting of trees, but such forests lack qualities of a natural one, like the ability to bring rain, say greens.

**BENGALURU:** The growth of Miyawaki forests in many patches in and around Bengaluru has helped increase the city's green cover and generated a lot of optimism. But, environmentalists have expressed doubts about the method and clarified that while such forests do have advantages, they cannot serve as replacements for natural forests.

Miyawaki is a Japanese technique of growing dense plantations in a short time. The method is being extensively used in and around Bengaluru by activists, corporate firms as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, and even individuals. A dense plantation can be grown from scratch in a span of two years using the method.

Environmentalist Yellappa Reddy has questioned the efficacy of the method that accelerates the growth of trees and claims to match a forest's complex ecosystem. "It is not a good idea to force plants to photosynthesise fast. Also, a forest is not just the trees, but a complex ecosystem," he said.

Leo Saldanha, a trustee of the Environment Support Group, said Miyawaki's increasing usage is being justified to cut trees. "It has reached a level where people say even if we cut trees or forests somewhere, we'll replace them by this method. Old-growth forests are millions of years old and can never be replaced and they can regenerate only if they are not disturbed too much," he said.

Saldanha such fast-growing plantations are actually wood lots and cannot be termed as forests. "There is no problem if the method is deployed, as long as chemical pesticides are not used. But a wood lot is not a forest," he said.

Environmentalist and founder of Eco-Watch Suresh Heblkar is also not a supporter of the Miyawaki method. He said the technique was started by the Japanese

considering the climate in Japan and the regular occurrence of natural calamities like earthquakes. “But I don’t think the method is good for a tropical country like India,” he said. Heblikar said Miyawaki forests can only be grown at smaller spaces in or near cities. He said such forests also lack some qualities of natural forests, such as medicinal properties and the ability to bring rain.

Saytrees, a voluntary group, has planted over 50,000 saplings in 17 locations using the Miyawaki method. Elaborating the advantages of this method, its member Durgesh Agrahari said the forests need to be maintained only for two years after which they can sustain themselves. He said two years after planting them, the trees start bearing fruits, which attracts birds, butterflies and bees. “It is a good way to improve the green cover, especially in pockets of congested cities like parks and hospitals,” Agrahari said.

Forests are very dense, which restricts the movement of any possible wildlife the forest might attract. “Nothing can replace something that is very natural in its form, like natural forests, but these plantations can supplement and complement them,” he said.

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