

More takers for seed balls

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On a first glance, they look like typically shaped Indian sweets. Only when you go close to them, you notice the coarse muddy exterior and understand that it is not edible. Neither they are mud balls which children enjoy making while playing. They are seed balls which are growing in popularity among people who want to indulge in Miyawaki method of planting, large-scale afforestation or even waste land reclamation project.

On Friday afternoon, a team of junior scientists at the Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding (IFGTB) were busy creating a new batch of 100 “seed balls” which has been ordered by an individual. “These seed balls contain graded seeds of four to five different species—like amla, Vilvam, Soapnut, Sandal and Arappu,” says R Anandalakshmi, head of seed technology department. “They are high grade seeds, which are treated with chemicals and biofertilizers so that their dormancy is removed, and they start germinating immediately, placed inside the medium which is made of coir pith and coated so that they don’t get eaten by insects. Once this is done, we place them into moulds, so they come in the shape we want,” she says.

Seed balls are preferred by people who want dense growth of trees, because it has seeds of five different species which even after getting dispersed by water or wind, will remain at a close distance from each other. “They sometimes grow less than five feet from each other. Out of the five species, at least three are likely to grow successfully,” Anandalakshmi said. “We usually provide species based on the current season and that are suited to dry conditions,” she added.

Recently, when TNAU students too took up a sapling planting drive of vegetables and crops, they choose to plant seed balls rather than seeds or saplings. “Since the balls contain natural microbes, they have a better chance of surviving than seeds and are more economical than saplings,” said an official.

Seed balls, which are the size of our yell urundais or kadalaurundai are also becoming a popular return gift. “Someone recently ordered 200 small-sized jute drawstring bags, with a washable lining, just to fill each one with around four seed balls,” said T Payal, a return gift bag maker in Ukkadam.

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