

Plant a tree, grow a forest closer to home

By Pavitra Sriprakash 24th March 2018

March 21 was the International Day of Forests, which automatically suggests in our minds, a place distant from our daily lives. The United Nations is working to reverse that by adopting the theme – Forests and Sustainable Cities for the year 2018. The primary benefit of forests and trees is that they store carbon, which mitigates climate change, especially in densely populated urban areas and provide shade. They can reduce the ambient by up to 8°C which passively cools buildings. Statistics show that a good tree planting strategy cuts energy for air conditioning by a third! Trees remove pollutants and fine particulates from the air, reduce noise pollution and act as buffers to keep residential areas quiet and serene.

On the outskirts of cities, forests protect our watersheds, manage floods, bolsters tourism which supports outdoor activities. The best trees to pick are the local varieties that grow easily and are adapted to local conditions. These also use the least water and are best suited for quick growth. My personal favorite is the Neem (*Azadirachta indica*), but other local trees like Tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*) & Punnai/Pungai (*Calophyllum inophyllum*) are also great for urban areas. Ideally, trees are planted during the dormant season or the months prior to monsoons or summer.

Cooler weather allows plants to establish roots in a new location before rains and sunlight stimulate new top growth. Once a spot for the sapling is picked it is important to check for underground obstructions like building

foundations, wells or electrical/sewage lines that impede roots later. Overhead wires and poles constrain the balanced spreading of the canopy. The planting hole should be broad and no more than 2-3 times wider than the root ball. Keep the hole as deep as the root ball itself. The broad part of the trunk at the base of the sapling should only be partially visible above the ground. This is important because if the tree is planted too deep, lack of oxygen will make it difficult for new roots to develop. Once the tree is properly placed in the pit, ensure it is straight and pack the soil around the base to stabilize.

Avoid fertilization at the time of planting; however you may add organic matter (such as red soil and manure) to hold moisture and help the sapling take root. Providing follow up care is as important as the task of planting itself. Water the tree at least once a week barring rain, and more frequently during hot, windy weather. It is important to keep the soil moist, but not waterlogged. So on this Day of Forests, bring a forest closer to home – adopt a neighborhood tree-planting program and live healthy and green!

Source:

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