

# This Chennaiite collects used cracker canisters to plant saplings

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This year's Deepavali may have gone by and the excitement of bursting crackers might have waned away for many, but not for Hafiz Khan, a Chennaiite who's kicked about 'bursting crackers' of a different kind, called tree bombs. He along with a set of volunteers have been collecting Deepavali trash, mainly used cracker canisters, to plant saplings in them. "So far, we've collected around 81,000 of them from different parts of Chennai. The aim was to collect one lakh and use them. But the numbers are less this year. It looks like people have burst fewer crackers this year because of the pandemic," says Hafiz. Hafiz, who is part of an organisation that grows man-made forests, adds, "Several volunteers, a few organisations, a few apartments and the city corporation have helped us in collecting used canisters."

According to Hafiz, canisters help in planting saplings in an eco-friendly manner. "Generally, in nurseries, saplings are planted in plastic covers. But they are non-recyclable. The whole idea is to move to more sustainable methods. We've tried out pots made of terracotta, cow dung, bamboo shoots, etc. But all those are expensive. This works out the best. We first thought about this idea last year after seeing thousands of canisters lying around on the roads. Last year, we used around 27,000 of them to plant saplings," he says.

Explaining how they make use of these canisters, Hafiz says, "These are made of recyclable paper and are sturdy. They hold up to 2kg soil and the saplings grow up to 4ft to 5ft in them, and are easy to transport. When you water them, the cardboard

retains the moisture. Once the sapling is about 5ft, the cardboard is punctured and planted in soil. Since cardboard is paper, it turns into compost. And the roots will continue their journey in the soil where the plant is planted.” Hafiz says that a variety of seeds are sown in these canisters, and by next June they’ll be ready for planting outside. “People can come and get the saplings for free from our nurseries; we’ll also use them for our plantation drives,” he says.

Benefits of planting a sapling in used cracker canister

1. Helps avoid used canisters going into dump yards
2. It’s an eco-friendly and cheaper option
3. Cardboard retains moisture
4. Holds up to 2kg soil in it
5. Sapling grows up to 5ft in it
6. Cardboard can be turned into compost