

## LIFE &amp; STYLE

# Trees of Cochin documents Kochi's green cover

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## Kochiite Aswathi Jerome celebrates the trees of Cochin on social media, leading to the discovery of rare and interesting finds

Have you ever noticed the teak trees in Kochi? Come June and the teak blossoms. "People hardly notice this aspect of the teak tree," says Aswathi Jerome, a dendrophile or a lover of trees who has trained the spotlight on them, this month. "The teak trees are in full bloom, the tiny flowers are all over the tree legs," she writes in an alluring reel on Instagram, calling the shower of teak flowers as Raindrops of Love.

Attracted by a campaign #FiftyTrees on Twitter, started in 2018 by Kolkata -based environmental activist Siddharth Agarwal, she soon found different cities of India launch their tree chapters where citizens posted photos of trees in the city. Inspired by the response, she launched #treesofcochin on Instagram in 2019.

"Start looking around you..the number of trees... and you will have a new perspective of your lanes, roads and highways," she says

Her first conversations started over the Queen's crepe myrtle (*Lagerstroemia speciosa*) that lines Panampilly Nagar. One had to wait a full year to see the deep pink blossoms.

An out of season blossoming laburnum or Kanikkona, that had bloomed in October, led to discourse on climate change.

As she found people's gaze turning towards the city's trees she titled the posts -Tree Lens, wanting people to wear 'Tree Goggles'.

She also widened the spotlight on to trees of Ernakulam, from Willingdon Island to Aluva, rather than the much-photographed Rain trees of Fort Kochi.

## Interesting trees





Some of her interesting recent finds are the Sausage tree (*Kigelia*), a native of Africa, that has fruits like “big sausages and flowers like a diya(oil lamp)”, and a tree similar to the Sapota with leaves of the mango in Kadamkkudy.

Along with trees, Aswathi is drawn to their botanical names and traces their origin, identity and properties through etymology, often networking with active tree groups on social



media, like Seasonwatch, a citizen science project studying seasonality of trees. (www.seasonwatch.in)

As a child she spent summer vacations in the fields and orchards of her maternal grandfather's lands in Vaikom, where the children of the family were handed over a tree to take care of. It was child's play but she formed a life lasting bond with Nature. Aswathi also credits her botanist mother and her grandfather, an agriculturist, for her interest in plants especially trees.

Teak trees in bloom in Thevara

"From February to April the stretch from Lulu Mall junction to Vytilla lights up with the golden Kanikkona blossoms and then the Gulmohar turns a flaming orange. Panampilly Nagar is lined with beautiful trees and so are the highways," says Aswathi adding that the

Copper Pod (*Peltophorum pterocarpum*) with its flamboyant yellow flowers is another common tree in the city. In the rainy months of June and July, she is busy photographing the blossoming teak trees

She plans tree walks by the year end, hoping to get permission from private homes, hospitals, schools and companies to open their premises for the walks, to photograph and celebrate the trees.

Standing under a bottle brush, in her apartment complex in Thevara, Aswathi says over phone, “I never miss a tree now.”

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