

**World Habitat Day | An IRS officer has set up India's first tree hospital in Amritsar**

04 October 2021



Rohit Mehra knows all about revenue and taxation. He can find income-tax evaders and flaws in tax returns. This Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer can crunch vast numbers. While wearing the mantle of Additional Commissioner Income Tax (Amritsar), Mehra is preoccupied with files and forms, but when he returns to his other love, he is busy setting up vertical gardens, micro-forests and spreading the word about his latest initiative - a free hospital for trees, the world's first tree and plant clinic and hospital with an ambulance.

Set up in Amritsar, the Smt Pushpa Tree & Plant Hospital & Dispensary works along with botanists, tree-lovers, scientists, ayurvedacharyas, forest experts, and Indian Forest Service (IFS) officers to address queries on plant diseases and treat them.

"The hospital is named after my late mother-in-law, and is totally free of cost. We provide about 33 kinds of services like removing nails on trees, tree guards, additional growth, transplantation service, etc. In first three days of the hospital's launch, we got more than 325 calls asking us to help them to maintain their plants and trees. A rickshaw has also been converted into a hospital that stocks all necessary plant medication," Mehra told moneycontrol.com.

According to the Center for Global Development, the world is set to lose more than a million square miles to deforestation by 2050 if we keep walking on the same environmental path. Worldwide, between 2015 and 2020, 10 million hectares of forests were destroyed annually. In India, tree felling doubled between 2016 and 2019, according to Ministry of Environment.

Mehra and his wife Geetanjali Mehra, an interior designer, have long been involved with tree plantation. The hospital is not Mehra's first foray into making the world greener. So far, Mehra has used nearly 7 lakh waste plastic PET bottles to create 500 vertical gardens in more than 30 cities. He has also set up micro-forests, the largest one being an 8-acre forest in Batala (Punjab).

"Gardens are urban lungs. With vertical gardens, not only tonnes of waste plastic is used but it is a treat to the eyes also. Vertical gardens can improve air quality, specially in concrete urban jungles. Micro-forests are natural oxygen chambers that curb air pollution and help in soil restoration," Mehra added.

As a continuum of his belief that plants have a soul and they breathe, emote and grow, Mehra borrows heavily from the 10th century Sanskrit text *Vrikshayurveda* by Surapala. The ancient text on the science of plant life was written in the archaic Nagari script.

To create that green mile, Mehra faced several challenges, the biggest being convincing people to set up vertical gardens or participate in micro-forestry initiatives. To spread the word and to cover more ground, so far Mehra's five-year-old non-government organisation (NGO) has collaborated with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), several NGOs as well as local bodies and the Forest department.

For Mehra, like Nobel Laureate Hermann Hesse, trees have always been the most penetrating preachers. He wants to start free plant hospitals and clinics in all cities of India. The IRS officer knows that it is an arduous task, but he plans to create an army of plant lovers and protectors by pushing the idea of making 'green habits' a part of school curriculum and teaching millennials the forgotten techniques of Vrikshayurveda.

#### **10th-century Ayurveda tips for plants**

- Bulbs should be planted in pits measuring one forearm - length, breadth, and depth - and filled with mud mixed with thick sand.
- Small trees should be transplanted by day at the proper directions when they are one forearm tall. The roots should be smeared with honey, lotus-fibre, ghee, and bidanga, and then planted in proper pits along with the earth.
- Big trees should be transplanted with their roots covered, during the evening, after reciting a specific mantra.
- To remove insects from the roots and branches of the , water the trees with cold water for seven days.
- Creepers eaten away by insects should be sprinkled with water mixed with oil cake. The insects on the leaves can be destroyed by sprinkling ashes and brick-dust on them.
- A wound caused by insects heals if sprinkled with milk after being anointed with a mixture of bidanga, sesame, cow's urine, ghee, and mustard.
- Broken trees should be smeared with a paste made with the bark of plaksa and udumbara mixed with ghee, honey, wine, and milk. The broken parts should be firmly tied together with the rope of a rice stalk. Fresh soil should then be filled in the basin around the trees, which should be sprinkled immediately with the milk of a buffalo and flooded with water.
- A tamarind plant grows into an excellent creeper if fed with water mixed with triphala powder.

Source: <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/environment/world-habitat-day-an-irs-officer-has-founded-indias-first-tree-hospital-7541341.html>