

## Let nature spruce up your air and water

R. Balaji



Reusing your water: With its phytoremediation abilities, plants can remedy degraded water and air. — K. Ramesh Babu

Activate your landscape – pay less for much more,” assures Eli Cohen, CEO, Ayala Water & Ecology, as he pushes for using greenery in landscape for more than just aesthetics.

Plants have the inherent ability to remove or trap a whole range of pollutants in the soil, in the air and water. Why not use this ability to your advantage? Whether in homes, offices or even cities forced to expand their borders by the day, natural resources are coming under pressure.

Water demand is increasing as is the need for power. And when needs are competitive, how do you prioritise? For instance, how much water goes for drinking, for growing food and for use in industry? The imperative is efficiency of use and reuse to ensure that we extract the full value of water. But in any city, nearly one-third of the energy used is spent on water supply, water-treatment and related activities.

Plants, says Cohen, are an obvious choice. They are good at phytoremediation, which means plants can remedy the degraded water, air and environment.

Participants at the Green Landscape Summit 2013 were treated to instances of townships and cities using vast green spaces as water treatment systems, including for sewage, even as they served as a place for social gathering in the heart of the city. Not just in the open spaces but also indoors, plants enhance air quality.

An indoor air quality expert at the event pointed out that oil from citronella, a grass species, is a common ingredient in natural mosquito repellants. The grass can be cultivated in the garden to repel the pestilential insect. Medicinal and herbal plants can be grown in pots indoors so that their curative properties can benefit the occupants.

But it is not just elsewhere on the globe that the changes are happening. Closer home, Indian cities are taking a positive step towards greener living spaces. It is only that these initiatives need to be broad-based and must expand to more cities and involve the general public so that greenery at home and in public areas can be nurtured. Visakhapatnam, for instance, has roped in industries and companies to plant trees by the roadside. The city administration has estimated that over 400 trees are needed for every kilometre of road. The Forest Department supplies three-year-old trees and companies and other institutions plant and nurture them, says B.V. A. Krishna Murthy, Divisional Forest Officer, Visakhapatnam Urban Development Authority.

This year, over four lakh trees will be planted and the administration will use satellite pictures to keep track of the progressing greenery. Chandrashekar Hariharan, Executive Chairman, BCIL Zed Habitats of Bangalore, said Governments cannot be expected to transport water and power over long distances. It is no longer sustainable. Wherever possible, conservation with increased efficiency of use, recycling and reuse have to be adopted.

In Bangalore, real estate developers, under the Confederation of Real Estate Developers Association of India, have set up decentralised processing systems where these are viable. More than 75 residents' associations have committed to treat waste locally.

C.N. Raghavendran, architect and Chairman, Chennai Chapter of the India Green Building Council, said just as architects, town planners, structural engineers and urban designers are statutory authorities in approving building plans, landscape architects too should be involved.

Landscaping has gone beyond just aesthetics but is now an essential part in the conservation and improvement of the quality of the environment we live in – both outdoors and indoors.

[balaji.ar@thehindu.co.in](mailto:balaji.ar@thehindu.co.in)

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***Townships and cities are now using green expanses as water treatment systems, including for sewage, and also as social and cultural spaces.***

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