

HOMES AND GARDENS

Tips on how to grow your own vegetables on a terrace garden



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Love to grow your own vegetables on a terrace garden? NM Mythreyan and V Balasubramaniam offer city dwellers advice on the nuts and bolts of setting up one

The first thing I notice when I reach the terrace is how organised everything is. The plants are arranged in neat rows, in green HDPE grow bags. There is a green shade net at one end which covers one third of the terrace, the walls are lime-washed. The area has been well utilised and there's even a small fruit section atop the water tank.

NM Mythreyan, who set up the garden with his brother-in-law V Balasubramaniam says, "We decided to start a roof garden about seven years ago. But at the time, we mostly had flowering plants. They flourished and in a short while we had a beautiful garden of ornamental plants. We then tried planting vegetables. These turned out very well and after

a few months we noticed that our vegetable bill came down significantly. So we replaced most of the flowering plants with vegetables. To facilitate cross pollination, we also planted herbs.” He adds, “Today about 70% of our weekly vegetables comes from our terrace garden – and its all organic.”



Mythreyan continues, “On weeks we had excess, we offered some of our vegetables to our neighbours and soon, a lot of them started coming to us for advice on setting up their own terrace gardens.”

Balasubramaniam explains: “That’s when we decided to offer advice and supplies to help people set up terrace gardens. From the outset we decided that our priority was not to make money but to help people. We charge a nominal fee for advice and add a small margin to the supplies to help us sustain the business. We’ve helped build over 1,500 terrace gardens across Chennai.” They have set-up a company called Indra Terrace Gardens that Yogalakshmi, Mythreyan’s wife runs.

Balasubramaniam says that they grow brinjal, chillies, curry leaves, tomatoes and leafy greens like spinach. In the summer, they plant cluster beans, cucumber, watermelon, okra, and bitter gourd and in winter, long beans, radish, carrot, beetroot, capsicum, among others.

When asked if water seeps into the floor below, Balasubramaniam says, “We use HDPE grow bags instead of clay pots that can crack easily and are quite heavy. The bags are light and waterproof. We also use coir mixed soil which absorbs and holds water.”



The duo collects dry leaves and food waste in a compost bin. This is converted into bio manure for the plants.

Water from their kitchen is routed to the garden. For pest control, they use neem oil, castor oil, a mix of chilli, ginger and garlic extracts. They've also planted flowering plants that act as a natural pest control agent.

Mythreyan and Balasubramaniam hope to raise awareness on terrace gardens. "A lot of people are not aware that an area of 500 to 600 sqft is all that's needed to meet 60 to 70% of the vegetable requirements of a family of four. The vegetables are organic, and having plants also brings down the temperature of the floors below. Also, the initial cost of setting this up is low and so is the maintenance."

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