

Indian flora finds guardian angels

By Sanjay Pendse/TNN

Pune: The names *umbar*, *karanj* and *hinganbet* may not exactly make for the same pretty pictures as *bougainvillea*, *croton* and *duranta*, but the indigenous plant species are far more precious from the ecological point of view.

Though sympathetic noises are often made about conserving indigenous species at hill-stations, luxury resorts and other green havens, three Puneites have set up perhaps the first ecological consultancy in India with an emphasis on the conservation of indigenous species.

"Plant a million inappropriate varieties and face the danger of having interfered with the natural system," warns a brochure of the firm, The Ecological Services (TES). But in a world where everything green, colourful, symmetric and imported is considered beautiful, the warning is not likely to be heeded in a hurry.

"It is time to change a mindset that looks at a piece of land in isolation. Every piece of land is a living ecosystem, with several species of birds, insects and animals depending on it for survival. It is also linked to



Ketaki Ghate, Manasi Karandikar and Mrinalinee Vanarase at work in their nursery of rare indigenous species.

the piece of land next to it. Landscaping projects often lose sight of this fact," explains Mrinalinee Vanarase, who along with Manasi Karandikar and Ketaki Ghate, founded the three-year-old consultancy.

The three firmly believe that the mindset needs to be changed, be it for a road project, a luxury resort or a satellite township. Besides ecolog-

ical landscaping, their projects include stream restoration, soil quality improvement, conservation of bird and insect life and design of eco-tourism destinations.

Through a network of associates, they bring an ecological perspective into architecture, non-conventional energy solutions and organic waste management.

They will soon rename

their firm, 'Oikos ecological services (OES)' after the Greek word for 'home', which is also the origin of the words 'ecology' and 'economy'. "TES sounded too generic, so we are changing it," says Manasi. For the moment, the website remains www.tesindia.com.

So who pays to reconstruct wilderness? Isn't indigenous wilderness expected to grow by itself? "Just as exotic plants are beautiful to some, to others, wilderness is beautiful. It is such clients who are willing to pay and with whom we like to work," says Mrinalinee.

In an effort to increase the use of eco-friendly, indigenous plants in gardening, landscaping, commercial plantations and agriculture, TES has organised 'Kalpataru', a special show of indigenous plants at the Kisan 2004 expo at Moshi, on the Pune-Nasik highway, from December 15 to 19.

The Kalpataru enclave will feature 15,000 saplings of more than 100 plant species. Saplings from six bio-geographic regions of Maharashtra will be represented. Hundreds of nurseries from across India will also exhibit rare species at the show.