

# Grow Natives - Every Monsoon !!

- Manasi Karandikar & Ketaki Ghate

Monsoon arrives and everybody is interested in doing plantations with great enthusiasm. Plantations mean 'save forest, save nature' to everyone. But just spare a minute and think.... Are we really doing the RIGHT thing for our environment, for our natural heritage? Are there any hidden facts about these plantations? Seems strange, but let's look at this process thoroughly.

Let us scrutinize species used for plantations - Eucalyptus, Australian Acacia, Australian teak, Subabul, Pink cassia, Gulmohar and many more. Just recollect origins for these species, its either Australia or Africa or America. These species are fast growing and beautiful, they make quick green cover for ground, are easily available in nurseries and are promoted by most government departments. But, every coin has two sides. Little do we realize that these non-native or exotic species have negative impact on our environment, our bio-diversity. They outnumber our own 'Deshi' plants, they start germinating & spreading fast, creating mono-cultures which are very dangerous to our bio-diverse regime. Still, they are being used in every plantation activity, knowingly or unknowingly. Harmful impacts of such plantations can now be seen in many parts of the country.

Unfortunately, very few know that plant origin matters! Planting a tree is not enough & right, planting NATIVE tree is appropriate. Many people do plantations with plants available in government nurseries; road contractors plant thousands of trees after the road is complete using large saplings without knowing which variety they are planting; the forest departments still use 'Videshi' varieties to protect our forests ... the list is unending. This

initiates a thought that we need to reach to a large number of people in different sectors with this concept of planting NATIVES.

In all this plantation effort, two things are common - everybody wants to save the environment and everyone uses non-native species. We easily remember the tree Gulmohar. No doubt it's beautiful but our own gorgeous Palas or Dhak is not even known to us. Why should this be so? Don't we have good trees? Can't they be used appropriately for plantations? How many people really know about this? Which are our own plants?

This is exactly the drive behind publishing a CD - GROW NATIVES. This CD is prepared after more than 3 years of travel, photography, research, documentation & compilations by the team of 'oikos for ecological services', a Pune based consultancy firm. People should know about our natural heritage and get ready data & information of native plants for use in every plant related activity.

This CD will be useful for Architects, Landowners, Nursery owners, Landscape contractors, Land developers, etc. It offers region specific lists for various uses like Landscaping, Medicinal plantations, Roadside avenues, Timber plantations, Religious plants and Ecological restorations.

In Maharashtra, Konkan & Sahyadri receive maximum rainfall, about 3000-6000 mm (average) annually; then, as clouds travel towards east, this average goes on decreasing in the region of Desh, Khandesh, Marathwada. Vegetation type & species also changes as per these bio-climatic zones from evergreens to scrub or grasslands. We should follow this pattern of nature while selecting the plants to have enhanced results & better environment. Only

"Indian" plants cannot be a sufficient criterion; locally appropriate plants should be selected for streams, slopes, hill tops, rivers, wetlands, coastline, or plains. The diversity in landforms & current status of land is equally important apart from climatic conditions. This is elaborated in 'Plantation Guidelines' section of the CD which also provides information about how to plant and maintain.

Core part of the CD is that it has information on & photos of 300 native plants including trees, shrubs, climbers, herbs & grasses. Information contains scientific data as well as uses like medicinal, ecological, food value, etc. Various symbols are also used for each plant plate that suggest rainfall region, sapling availability, flower color and tree canopy shape for easy understanding.

Those who want to search the plants either by scientific name or common name can view through full list which also gives lists for plants common to India, mangroves, "Nakshatra" plants, availability of saplings and plants for galleries.

The point is our own 'native' plants have the potential and the right to be planted in gardens, on hills, roadsides, virtually everywhere, to support and start healthy processes in nature & environment. They deserve to be preserved!

So, let's prefer our own, indigenous plants which have deep roots in our culture, are strongly associated with wildlife & have evolved for thousands of years with nature.

The CD can be purchased from leading book stores in Pune like Popular Book House, Pathfinder or Manneys or directly from oikos's office.

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