

In support of native trees

Kalyani Sardesai | TNN

TOI

Pune: The Native Growers Group, a recently constituted group of like-minded and environment-conscious citizens, has a singular mission of promoting awareness and giving out information on the importance of planting native varieties of trees and plants within housing societies, gardens, farmhouse compounds, public gardens as well as the villages.

A sound logic supports their mission. Native varieties, as opposed to non-native ones, have a longstanding and symbiotic association with local ecosystems and wildlife and are therefore, more beneficial.

“The Native Growers Group will provide consultancy, information as well as saplings to individual growers, mass plantation initiatives and housing societies,” said Vivek Gour Broome, a member of the group. “The ratio of native trees must increase within cities, and non-native varieties should be banned in the countryside. Once someone establishes contact with us, the range of our work will include spot visits, advice and provision of saplings,” he said.

Another member Ketaki Ghate said that people should plant native trees, especially during the monsoon, in the interest of positive nature conservation. Nature lovers and enthusiasts can participate in seed collection and germination with the help of experts in the group, she added.

“It is not as if we are against planting non-native varieties. However, they do not really support local wildlife, and carry the inherent risk of overwhelming local biodiversity by spreading rapidly,” said Ghate. “Take for instance the ‘subabhul’ tree, which is not native to Pune. Since the



Stereospermum colais or ‘padal’ is an example of a native tree

seeds of the plant have a high rate of germination, the ‘subabhul’ tree generally tends to spread like wildfire. Similarly, bougainvillea was recently introduced in the jungles of Mahabaleshwar, though it is not local to that ecosystem.”

“Some non-native varieties, like Bottle brush and cassia, are an exception and support local wildlife. However, the ratio of native to non-native trees in the city of Pune is negligible. In fact, some varieties like ‘dakshin moha’, ‘sada moha’, ‘padal’, ‘bija’ and ‘beheda’ are a rare sight in the cities, though they can be found in abundance in the forests,” said Manasi Karandikar, another member of the group. “But in pre-Independence India, these native varieties were commonly grown in the city as is evident from the records.”

Other members of the group include Ajit Thakur, RM Dhole, Shridhar Koparkar, Suhasini Koparkar and Bhanudas Chavan. Details of the group are available on the website www.oikos.in.