

# Rooftop farmers reap rich harvests

Author - Jayant Sriram, Published on - 9.12.2015

*Urban farmers do their bit to make the city a cleaner, greener place to live*

*Growing tribe: Two terrace farms — Don Bosco School campus in Matunga and Bhavan's campus in Andheri — are part of a growing community that create new green spaces in Mumbai despite the city's space crunch.— Photos: Special Arrangement For several years Preeti Patil, a catering officer with the Mumbai Port Trust (MbPT), saw the waste being generated from her canteen simply being trucked away, wondering how it could have been put to better use. In 2000, the MbPT let her use the terrace above the kitchen at Victoria Dock to start a terrace garden. In the years that followed, the garden flourished, housing over a 100 varieties of fruits and vegetables. In 2009, encouraged by the success of this garden, Ms Patil decided to share the knowledge and experience of terrace farming with a wider audience, and she formed*

*Urban Leaves*

*, a volunteer city farming group. They currently manage two other terrace farms — one on the [Don Bosco School](#) campus in Matunga, and one on the [Bhavan's](#) campus in Andheri — and are part of a growing community that create new green spaces in Mumbai despite the city's space crunch. [Space to experiment](#) These urban farmers educate people about the benefits of organic farming and also do their bit to make the city a cleaner, greener place to live. Similarly, about 10 years ago, Julius Rego was looking for a space to experiment with organic farming after attending a workshop on organic farming. A hospital in Navi Mumbai gave him a dumping ground to work with and after converting that into a garden he was offered space by the Tata Cancer Research Hospital to create a similar space. Today, [Green Souls](#), the volunteer organisation that Mr Rego started, run farms in Dongra and Deonar as well as a terrace farm at Our Lady's Home in Dadar spread out over a 5,000 square feet space. "There is a lot of space to create green spaces if one just looks," Mr Rego explains. "In Dadar alone there is more than 15,000 square feet of space if you take all the houses with terraces." Like Urban Leaves and Green Souls another group that works with promoting urban farming is Fresh & Local. Their 2,000 square foot community garden sits atop a residential building on Mohammad Ali Road and they grow over 50 varieties of fruits, flowers and vegetables. Mr Rego and Ms Patil say that the movement to start more such city farms is growing as people are realising the benefits of growing their own produce as a healthier and more sustainable way of living.*

*Waste problem*

*Additionally, they say, the benefit of these farms is that they help the city deal with its organic waste problem. "Rather than getting in soil from the forest in trucks a large portion of the material we use are things like leaf litter, tree trimmings and kitchen waste. This is otherwise material that would have been sent to the dumping ground," he explains. In 2014 alone, Mr Rego estimates that Green Souls saved about 50 tonnes of waste from going to landfills and was instead used to grow fresh organic produce. Urban leaves has started a similar campaign in the city called Save a Leaf, which seeks to educate people about the fact that burning leaves is a major contributor to pollution in the city. "Leaves that fall from the trees are supposed to go back into the soil and enrich it. But what happens is that people just sweep them up, even from gardens, and then it is burned along with plastics or other toxic waste," she explains. [Save A Leaf campaign](#) The Save A Leaf campaign is an attempt to get people together to see that this organic waste is used in a better way. "As a lay person I can't control the traffic or the number of factories that are coming up in the city but this is one way in which I can help the city," Ms Patil explains. First published by **The Hindu***