

Seed swap, a growing trend among green thumbs

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Sharing a passion: A file photo of participants at a seed swap event organised at Cubbon Park in Bengaluru. Special Arrangement

From virtual connection on social media to physical meet-ups, urban gardeners are slowly but surely warming up to the idea

Sharing food, or even ingredients, is common. Now, however, the growing number of people who share a passion for growing their own food also share an essential component of what they produce: the seeds.

Right from virtual connection on social media to physically meeting, residents of the city are slowly but surely warming up to the idea of seed sharing.

This exercise not only ensures higher germination rates and less dependence on commercial sellers, but also gives novices in the field a chance to learn first-hand from the experienced on how to go green and organic, they say.

Good response

After organising its first Seed Swap in 2017, the Backyard Factory is back with another swapping event this month. "The first seed swap event was well appreciated. We had posted information about the event on Facebook and a good number of people turned up for the event at Cubbon Park. The idea was to let people bring excess seeds from their produce and share them with people who are interested in growing their own food. It was a mutual exchange. What was surprising was most of the participants were young gardening enthusiasts," said Lincy Inder, who conducts kitchen gardening workshops for schoolchildren. This time, the event will be held on June 30 at Cubbon Park, and Ms. Inder expects even better participation than the last time.

While meetings are very essential for seed sharing, another group also makes good use of social media to share seeds with the community. Members of Grow Your Own Food, a Facebook community, put up details of excess seeds available with them on social media. Others can contact the group if interested. The members meet once in two months for a seed swapping event at Lalbagh.

"Whatever we grow, we save the seeds for ourselves and to share with others," said Suresh Rao, a member of the group.

Mr. Rao said the best thing about seed sharing is that there is 100% guarantee of the seeds germinating. "It is not the case with store-bought seeds. We usually share tomato, brinjal, gourd, and all types of greens during the meets," he said. The group also promotes heirloom seeds by sharing them.

Explaining how the members store the excess seeds for sharing, he said, "It is quite easy. From two tomatoes, 100 seeds can be obtained, which can be saved for the next season. One brinjal has around 200 seeds. Though the seed saving technique for each variety differs, it is not rocket science. During the meet-ups, we share the concepts with newcomers," Mr. Rao said.

Another city-based group, Oota From Your Thota, which encourages people to grow their food organically, also organises seed swaps among members regularly.

A common practice

While urban gardeners are just getting used to the idea of seed sharing, the practice is common among farmers, said Hemanth, farmer and member of the Facebook group Bangalore Gardening. "In our farming community, seed sharing has always been a common practice. It helps reduce farmer's dependence on commercially sold seeds and saves a lot of money," he says.

The Horticulture Department too gives away seedlings instead of just seeds to anyone interested. "After monsoon, we distribute the excess seedlings to interested people for free. Most are tree seedlings. In a year, at least 5,000 seedlings are given away," said M.R. Chandrashekar, Deputy Director, Lalbagh.

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