

Believe me, garbage is hip

Malavika Velayanikal



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Man and garbage; they come together. And after perpetual experiments by the former to dump the latter, we still haven't traversed too far. Individuals, universities, institutes, research on some million-and-one ways to Reduce, Reuse and Recycle and the tad distance covered has got us only to the point where we can chant the triple-R mantra a few times a day.

Vrunda Rao Bhaskar, national coordinator of Children's Movement for Civic Awareness (CMCA), is one of those green Bangaloreans who insists that all of us do our bit towards garbage riddance. And she practices what she preaches by feeding the flora around her house something they love to lap up — compost, a nutrient, dark in colour and sweet smelling. This she makes solely out of the everyday wet waste her kitchen spews out. A little bit of effort and time, and a tiny space is all it takes of Bhaskar.

Composting is the decomposition of plant remains and other once-living materials to make an earthy, dark, crumbly substance that enriches soil. Out there in the forests, composting happens with the natural cycle as dead leaves fall and decay and the soil claims it back and the roots feed on them. But in our small spaces, the nature's ways need a bit of prodding by some conscientious green thumbs.

Vrunda took her first step towards aerobic composting (composting in the presence of oxygen) by segregating the everyday garbage into wet and dry waste. The wet waste is essentially kitchen waste, including leftovers, and garden waste like weeds and dry leaves. Then she took a trip to Daily Dump, a service that helps you manage your household waste and convert it to useful high-quality compost, at Indiranagar. They gave her a set of beautifully crafted terracotta pots called Kambha — a 3-tier composting product. And so began her compost pursuit.

She filled in pot A with a layer of soil and some dry leaves and the day's kitchen waste went on top. After four days, she put some more leaves and stirred the mixture. Sometimes, when it got too wet and soggy, she put some more mud. When it was three-fourths full, she exchanged it with pot B in the middle and waste was then dumped in pot B, now on top. In around 3-4 weeks, the material in pot A reduced in volume and this was transferred to pot C at the bottom. Pot A was now empty and it took the place of pot B when it got three-fourth full. By around the sixth week, Bhaskar had some powdery nutrient rich compost ready.

The composting material discharges water called leechate and these pots are designed in a way that it filters down to pot B and then to C, to be absorbed by the almost done compost. Woven plastic wire mesh and newspaper sheets in the top and middle pots act as separators and make room for air to get in from the bottom, aiding aerobic composting. There are also air holes on the pots for ventilation.

Bhaskar had to put up with quite a few frowns from her family members when the compost pots became a healthy breeding spot for maggots. But very soon, she found a way to go around the swarming colonies of maggots and that was by adding chilli powder or turmeric to the kitchen waste. Neem leaves can help as well, successful experiments taught her.

Not only has she been composting herself, she has also been encouraging others, including children, to follow the practise. She has been spreading the word to young students via CMCA, which offers a module of civic action on garbage disposal.

The loudest advocate for composting, she feels, is the five-year-old neem tree in front of her house. Since she began feeding it home-made compost, it has shot up to an impressive height. This, to her, is more than enough incentive to continue with the pursuit.

Those interested in composting can log on to www.dailydump.org or call 080-41152288

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