



We, as women, innovate every day. As we multi-task our way through the world, the only way to stay in the game is by discovering smarter ways to do everything. Imagine, if one day inspiration struck and you had a brilliant brainwave. Imagine it transformed your community or saved lives or created a vision for the future. Our campaign celebrates such incredible ideas and the women behind them. We bring you their inspiring stories in every issue and get them to tell us how they hit upon their Big Idea. By training the spotlight on such women, we hope you are encouraged to follow your own moments of discovery. And if you believe you already have a Big Idea or know of someone who has, write to us at [femina@wom.co.in](mailto:femina@wom.co.in) with "What's the big idea" in the subject line. Happy inventing!

## PUT YOUR GARBAGE TO WORK

A stack of three terracotta pots and an idea—that's all Poonam Kasturi Bir uses to turn daily organic waste into rich compost for potted plants. **Madhuri Velegar K** finds out how you can do it in your home, for Rs 800

**A**s one of the founders of Sriшти School of Art, Design and Technology in Bangalore, Poonam Kasturi Bir has always been teaching her students to use design in fun yet practical ways to make sense of the world. But after teaching at Sriшти for 12 years, Poonam, a National Institute of Design alumnus, decided it was time to move on. "I asked myself, 'Do I make money or make sense?' Then I looked at a common problem—waste disposal. It's not glamorous, so we don't discuss it. That's why I decided to talk about it. I wanted to offer a non-fussy and fun method to deal with waste."

### The ticking problem...

"Have you ever been to a landfill site? Big Indian cities generate roughly ►



Poonam's invention, the *Khamba*, is available on [www.dailydump.org](http://www.dailydump.org)

3,000 tonnes of waste per day," says Poonam. Plastic, metal, milk covers, foil, broken bulbs are all dumped into ever-growing landfills, but a large portion of the waste that is dumped is organic and bio-degradable and therefore, essentially non-polluting. "I thought it was just wrong to dump bio-degradable waste with broken tubelights, batteries, plastic and medicines that pollute ground water, soil and the air," explains Poonam. "For example, if you mix plastic, papaya and a broken tubelight, after some months, it releases methane gas into the air, which is deadly and can cause global warming."

Disturbed by the state of affairs, Poonam met a Karnataka state government representative to ask him where the budget on waste management was being spent. He shocked her by saying that there was no budget for it. Poonam made up her mind. "I thought it was time to take ownership for what we were doing, even in the smallest way. An urban family of four generates anything from 750 g to 1.5 kg of organic waste every day and if every household decides to compost at home, our total waste would be a lot more manageable."

### ...and an idea played out

Poonam came up with the plan for a composter. The essential idea behind the composting process is to dump all your organic kitchen waste like watermelon peels, egg shells and stalks into a compost pit in the backyard and cover it, so that it turns into nutritious garden compost in time. But backyards are hard to find in cities and most of us can't fit this back-breaking task into our hectic lives, even if we are lucky enough to have a garden.

So Poonam created an easy solution. "I wanted to design an attractive home composter that could be used by everybody," explains Poonam. "Two years went into



Put the waste in the first pot of the Khamba and place it at the bottom after it's three-quarters full

### INSIDE POONAM'S IDEA

The Khamba has three pots, one stacked on top of the other. All of them have ventilating holes and the last one stands on a planter bowl. Once the pot on top is three-quarters full, it is placed at the bottom and this cycle continues. By the time the last pot on top is filled, the waste matter in the bottom-most pot has slowly converted into a mush-like substance. If it's too watery, it may attract maggots, so it has to be stirred after tossing in a few dry leaves. If it is not very wet, a few drops of water and stirring will do the trick. Fruit flies can be kept away with neem sprays. Since the pot needs oxygen to decompose, it needs to be stirred regularly. After about three months, the nutrient-rich compost is ready to fertilise your potted plants.

To compost, you can put all these foods in a pot and stir—tomato, mosambi, lime, roots, corn, nuts, seeds, mango pits, vegetable cuttings, onion peels, banana peels, watermelon skin, tea bags, egg shells, tea and coffee grounds, tissue paper, dried flowers, saw dust, shredded paper, cooked fish or chicken bones, and dried leaves. Avoid putting in coconut shells because they take too long to decompose.

**AS OF FEB 2010,  
3,738 KG OF WASTE  
HAS BEEN KEPT  
OUT OF LANDFILLS,  
THANKS TO  
THE KHAMBA.**

designing a suitable prototype. We went to potters to execute the final design, which involved creating colourful terracotta pots with holes on the side that could be stacked on top of each other. We call it the Khamba and you can order it over the Net at [www.dailydump.org](http://www.dailydump.org). We also make house-visits to give demos on how it works. The only 'work' involved in using this composter is stirring the pot once in two to three days, so that the mix gets some oxygen to compost." The composter and the stirring tools cost Rs 800.

### It's a hit

Poonam finds her most enthusiastic followers in schools where youngsters are kicked about the power of composting. She has also released two series of books to help them understand the need for composting.

"Also, as of February 2010, 3,738.35 kg of organic waste is being kept out of landfills every day by customers who use my home composter and convert it into nutritious manure," says Poonam. "It's been four years since we began [dailydump.org](http://dailydump.org), we have clones in two cities, and have shared our drawings with 58 countries who would like to follow our model." ●

