



How tech can influence our exercise behaviour

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With a rise in terrace gardening, zero-kitchen-waste advocates are excited to note a parallel rise in people making their own compost and fertilisers at home

•• SWETA AKUNDI

Kuppulakshmi Krishnamoorthy's is a family of three... or three billion, if you also count the microorganisms stewing inside the two compost bins sitting on the balcony of her fourth floor apartment in Urapakkam, near Chennai.

Composting, along with gardening, is a childhood joy of Kuppu's that she rediscovered in 2020, while quasi-homeschooling her eight-year-old daughter.

"I had been wanting to grow my own vegetables and compost for a while now. But it took staying at home for so many months and making our own meals every day to realise how much waste we create," says Kuppu. For the past few months, the waste from every meal – peels, shells, coconut husk – and the grounds from every cup of coffee made, all go into an old bucket making do as a compost bin.

It was but natural that a rise in kitchen gardening would lead to a rise in composting at home, believes Bengaluru-based Vani Murthy, a pioneer dubbed 'Compost Queen' on social media.

Member of the city's Solid Waste



One with the SOIL



Management Round Table (SWMRT), Vani has been an advocate for decentralising waste management for a decade now, but the attention it has received in 2020, "has been phenomenal," she says. "Everybody started growing food at home, but that movement also needed people to look for fertilisers. Rather than buying, they want to create their own nutrients for the soil."

Her Instagram page, @womrani, saw a rise of followers from 5,000 before March to over 80,000 now, thanks to her steady stream of workshops, IGTVs and posts featuring composting hacks. "I am constantly holding meetings on my terrace. We have had people from Sikkim, and even

China attend," she says.

Bombarded by an overwhelming number of queries, Vani says she tells people to look at it as a trend but "make sure they understand why they are composting first. I tell them about how we are losing our resources, how compostable material gets trapped in landfills and releases methane, and how we need to regenerate soil quality by putting those nutrients back to the soil where they belong."

Another member of SWMRT, Vasuki Iyengar, points out a probable reason for the rise in the interest in composting. "In the initial months of the lockdown, as families could not rely on maids and housekeeping staff, people in apartments would have to go downstairs and deposit their own kitchen waste. That exposure may have made them start thinking about composting," he says.

Founder of Soil and Health Solutions, a waste management service in Bengaluru, Vasuki makes and installs different types of compost bins in the city. "Since June, I have been observing an increase in the number of online gardening and composting classes, and we are also receiving more online orders for bins," he says. From April to October, SWMRT hosted 200 sessions on composting with an overall participation of 14,000 people from Bengaluru, Chennai, Mumbai, Pune and Goa, among others. Oota from your Thotta,

How a yoga connection helped Danesh bag A Suitable Boy

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COMPOSTING HACKS

Think of your compost bin as a bread sandwich, suggests Archana Stalin. The bottom and top 'brown' layers are dry (coconut husk, soil, newspaper) and the middle 'green' layer comprises peels and other waste.

Stir the compost once a week to get the microbial action going. Add yeast or buttermilk to accelerate the process. You might not want to add cooked food, as they lead to a foul smell. "Cooked leftovers can be rather given to stray animals," suggests Archana.

Indian climates generally suit aerobic composting, however, in case you have space constraints, you can try bokashi composting, says Vani Murthy. It is an anaerobic method involving fermenting. It can also take cooked leftovers which are unsuitable for aerobic composts.

Vasuki Iyengar recommends making onion compost tea by soaking onion and garlic peels for two days and using a diluted form of that water as fertiliser.

Squelch! (Clockwise from far left) Archana Stalin with her bioenzymes; Kuppulakshmi's daughter composting; Vani Murthy • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

perhaps your best bet when stepping into the hobby, according to Chennai-based Archana Stalin. "Many communities in Chennai have started composting enthusiastically, but few have been successful. You need to be consistent for that," notes the founder of farm rental service myHarvest Farms. "If the initial investment isn't costly, you won't feel guilty if anything goes wrong," she adds.

The aatmanirbhar life

Though she has been composting for about six years, even she learnt something new during the lockdown. "For the past four months, I have been doing my laundry with bio-enzymes I made myself," she says. These are homemade cleaning agents – centre of focus for most of 2020 – made using citrus peels, jaggery and water.

For Archana, it started the day she made huge quantities of lemon rice, resulting in peels and peels of citrus. "I couldn't use citrus peels in composting as they go bad, so I needed to do something else with them. That's when it struck me that I could make my own cleaning liquid," she says, adding that the ease of the process made it better. "Fermentation happens on its own for three months, all I had to do was open and close the lid of the jar."

Living a zero-waste life, says Archana, is a family effort, starting right from the segregation of waste. Kuppu, her partner and their eight-year-old could not agree more. With their daughter's school shut, they are more conscious about the kind of knowledge they are imparting to her. "She always has so many questions, she's an old soul in a kids body."

Outside their window, lives a family of mynahs that Kuppu and her daughter observe. "Every day we see how living can be so simple, and how we choose to make it so complex," remarks Kuppu. "Composting is just one of the changes we want to make towards leading a simpler life."

Her bucket of microbes is one month away from being ready to use. "It smells wonderful, and I can't wait."

another such community on organic gardening, has been hosting sessions every Sunday on Facebook and Zoom, with over 2000 views each.

For beginners on his Instagram, Vasuki has put up short videos on 'jugaad' or 'dabba' composting. "I explain how to turn paint buckets or takeaway food containers into compost bins," he says.

Using old drums to store compost and covering them with cardboard is



Breaking the glass ceiling

Indo Cine Appreciation Foundation, in association with the Embassy of the Argentine Republic, New Delhi, organises an online Argentine Film Festival 2020, given the current circumstances. This year's festival presents Gafas Violetas (Violent Glasses), a series of films focusing on themes related to gender, women empowerment, sexual diversity, non-binary identities and gender stereotypes among others. Curated by National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts of Argentina, the festival hopes to put the spotlight on films made by women. Some of the movies include: *Interlude*, *All My Joy*, *Hive*, *The Pretty Ones* and *The Queen* to name a few.

Argentine Film Festival is slated for weekends and will go on till November 29. For details, visit: <https://icaf.in/> or call: 9840151956.

Welcome the winter

National Centre for Performing Arts will be hosting its first Winter Fiesta from November 16 to 20, comprising virtual workshops that includes dance, music, literature and storytelling for children in the age group of three and above. It will kickstart with the 'Happy Feet' and 'Dance Dynamic' workshops which will be conducted by dance instructor Mahafreenn Irani. Mahafreenn will be teaching different dance styles like hip hop, Bollywood and retro. On the final day, the children will present a virtual performance.

'Feet in the Sand' workshop by author, teacher and poet Sakshi Singh will take children on a much-needed virtual escape to the beach. Singh will also revisit her bilingual book on the environment, *Feet in The Sand/Raiit mein Paav*. Taking them on a magical quest will be 'Hocus Pocus', a magic session with professional mentalist Kruti Parekh.

Over the course of five days, children will also be taught to make puppets from things easily available at home under the guidance of Sangya Ojha. Making literature come alive will be Oindrila Purohit and Veena Manoj of Grooming Babies Global Pvt. Ltd.

as they take the kids on an exciting journey exploring the treasure trove of stories from ancient history.

For the entire line-up, details specific to each workshop and to register, visit: bookmyshow.com, ncpamumbai.com or write to winterfiesta@ncpamumbai.com.



Let the light shine in

A model retirement community project in Coimbatore revisits traditional architecture designs that use sunlight as a natural disinfectant for the building

•• K JESHI

"The pandemic has been good for us," jokes Dhinakar Perumal as he walks around a model villa in the Nirmala Nilayam Retirement Community (NNRC) campus near Siruvani, 15 kilometres from Coimbatore city. "COVID-19 made us revisit traditional architectural designs such as the sky-lit courtyard that lets sunlight filter in and disinfect the building," he says.

The compact villas for senior citizens modelled after the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards of the US, use the traditional Open To Sky (OTS) design, where an area in the house directly opens to the sky and is covered by fibre or translucent glass.

"Nothing like sunlight to san-

itise homes," says architect Manikandan Ilango who has designed the villas. He has done projects across South India for over two decades and is also working on green villas. "Healthy living is the keyword now. Our vernacular traditional buildings with courtyards were designed with forethought. At NNRC, we have used natural sunlight wherever possible. OTS is a traditional concept that we lost along the way. It is now making a comeback."

Buzzing with activity

Dhinakar says the project took off when he began looking for a retirement home for his mother. "Retirement communities abroad pack in a lot of fun. I frequented some in the suburbs of Malden, Massachusetts, during

BRIGHT SPACES

Consult an expert. One should ensure that it is set up at a specified angle and is waterproof

Choose a clear or translucent glass cover

Ensure that there is an outlet to let hot air out

If occupants are averse to exposure to direct sunlight, the space can be designed to allow partial exposure

Trellises can be used or trees can be planted outside for partial shading

Retractable shading can also be designed, especially for bedrooms

my stay in Boston," says Dhinakar, adding how he watched people there play pétanque, basketball, croquet and frisbee. "That's the kind of retirement home I wanted for my mother: a place buzzing with energy. Though she passed away the same year, I decided to go ahead with the project in her memory."

Located at Theethipalayam, off Siruvani Road, at the foothills of the Western Ghats, the sprawling green campus has spaces earmarked for pottery, sculpting and painting. A gazebo with a double-layered tile roofing and open sides all around stands tall in the middle of the property.

Says Dhinakar, "We have OTS primarily in spaces that are wet like bathrooms, utility areas, and kitchen. The ceiling is kept at 11 ft to ensure better air circulation in rooms. The portico us-



Designed with flare A model home at Nirmala Nilayam Retirement Community campus near Siruvani • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

es traditional Kerala style double-layered tiled roof to have a cooling effect."

For a sustainable future

More people are opting for skylit courtyards, especially during the pandemic, says Bengaluru-based Sathya Prakash Varanashi who specialises in sustainable architecture. "All traditional homes around the world, in Japan, India, Europe or Africa have OTS courtyard in the centre. We avoided it in modern day buildings because of mosquito menace or the fear of rain-water coming in. Now, we cover it with a window grill for security and use glass for light."

Sathya Prakash, who has designed homes in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu for over two decades, says that sunlight inside homes ensures continuous circulation of fresh air. "It distributes light in all directions. It is best to have the ceiling at 15 or 20 ft high to accommodate the OTS courtyard. This way, the inside spaces look larger and better." He lists out other advantages too: the aged can bathe in sunlight right inside the homes and get their dose of Vitamin D.

The OTS concept has gained traction among people designing holiday homes away from the city and want to bring Nature back into their lives, says Mumbai-based artist Neha Arte, an environmental architect who works with sustainable designs and green buildings. "OTS works beautifully for green buildings that are basically about creating energy efficient, healthy and comfortable spaces. It saves energy as it reduces the need for artificial lighting and mechanical ventilation," she says.

Then, there are additional perks such as beautiful views of lush treetops and bursts of bird song that add to the experience.