

LOVING AND LIVING WITH PLANTS

BY LAILA KARIM



Beat the heat with your cool roof!

This is Baishakh – the first month of the Bangla year! The scorching sun is not only giving us the feel, but also asking us to adopt the survival skills! An email from Mrs. Shahana Parvin last week prompted me to say something about it. 'I live on the top floor [of an apartment] measuring 1300 sqf. It is very hot in the summer and I want to get rid of the heat through plantation. I have few questions regarding this: (1) What plants I can buy for absorbing heat?(2) How to plant them? What way?(3) How to keep the tubs? Moreover, the plants cost high. So, I would be very thankful to you for the solution,' she asked.

Her questions are pretty straight forward. Before going to the detailed answers, first I would like to share my personal experience. I also live in a multi-storied building and I chose the top floor as I wanted an uninterrupted view of the wide blue sky to enjoy the heavenly scene of the full moon night, count the shoporshi (7 stars) and witness the falling meteors! Perhaps my childhood stories on the seven wonders – Hanging Garden of Babylon worked in my mind. The top floor has so many advantages! It is always the best for more light and air and of course less noisy. All these experiences are great. But on arrival of the summer, I/we started feeling the other side of living at the top! I decided to do a garden just over our roof – a combination of a mixed group of plants – from the standing trees (hybrid) to the tiniest type. In over a two years period, it has turned to a chunk of green on the air. The effort was loved by many, but a few had different views (as in a

joint property, it is not fair to nurture a personal hobby etc. etc.). True! My heart bled, but I accepted the reality and dismantled it!

But dear Mrs. Parvin, please do not get disheartened with the above. It is just a cautionary note. If it is a community living, first talk to the management and get their clearance or endorsement. Now a days, roof gardening is promoted by all. This is one effective way to beating the heat and contributes to the cooling of the temperature. There are many ways of roof gardening. I shall limit myself to simple techniques. Similar to all other projects (small or big), it also needs a person's time, energy, love and financial investment and mental readiness to accept the ups and down of its phases. You need to spend a considerable amount of time and get a helping hand at the initial first six months and the rest is routine work, including the seasonal updates. There are many ways of cooling the top floor heat through gardening such as turning the roof to a grass field. Well this is a bit expensive too. Better to think about container gardening – the order will be to place the big plants in rows around the roof wall sides with plants, or vice versa. You may consider low maintenance nice flowering plants like bougainvillea, Krishna chura, along with fruit bearing plants like mango, guava, dalim/aanar, olive, sajna etc. Then in the second row – you may have the rows of used bath tubs, or similar type bigger body containers (for making seasonal flower beds or for seasonal vegetables like

dherosh, paatshak/kolmishak, green chillis, dhonpata etc) and in between you may place the regular – different sized containers to plant capsicum, egg plants, etc. If you are more of a vegetable lover, otherwise all these could be marked for the flowers, seasonal or all season types. I prefer both. You may use the corner areas for the flowing types – climbing plants (for your kitchen, you may go with sweet, bitter or regular gourds.) These will be fine on walls with some support. So for a total garden,



you need to have a variety of containers. To make a green belt of your estimated space you may need to have about 8/9 of those (available in Karwan or similar bazaars), then the wide body containers two to three will do (available in old building materials outlets). Once I also thought about those round shaped -bamboo cases where the wholesalers keep the chickens in market places. This seems to be appropriate for making flower beds or for planting seasonal leafy vegetables such as Shaak. But

these need to be made durable too. So it would be good to cover the outer and inner sides with sand and cement coating and place the jhakis on a brick support. This will allow you not to damage the roof but also to flow air and will be easy to clean. Get eight – nine regular sized containers as per availability of the space from any nursery.

I will suggest you to revisit the space at the beginning, make a mind map and also on paper, calculate the total in terms of materials (containers, soil, fertilizer, pesticide, water source and required lengthed- pipe for every day watering, tools shovel/forks and a plant scissors, bamboo sticks (to support the plants and make sheds for the climbing one) and also a jharu/floor wiper. Now calculate the plants you want to have. Fruit bearing plants are a bit expensive, but there are low cost or no cost plants – branches of which could be collected from the neighbourhood as I did for Sajna, Krishna chura and kathbadam. All these are easy to grow; just give a good base (rich soil, access to sun, light and regular water) and they will thrive. I will also suggest you to visit a few nurseries where the price will be competitive. With everything, I see a capital investment of around Tk. 12 to 16,000/. Initially it looks high, but I can assure you that the return will be high too!

Please feel free to send me email to share your thoughts, feedback, and photos of your garden, or tell your story; ask a question on the garden issue. Send emails to lifestyleds@yahoo.com

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