

# Rooftop gardens blooming amidst pandemic

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Stuck at home? Can't go out to the park? There IS no park? Build your own then. Coronavirus has barred people from going out unless in an emergency. It has upended people's regular lifestyle by making a lot of the day-to-day action near-impossible for people, which made them turn to rooftop gardening. The number of roof gardeners is on the rise as people staying indoors are looking for ways to vent their frustrations into something productive. Consequently, the sales of saplings, seeds, soils, fertilisers and gardening accessories are soaring high.

Johora Khanom Roji, a part-time jobholder and recently turned rooftop gardener said, "I decided to give rooftop gardening a try recently as the pandemic took hold of the country. I am in the initial stage in this initiative of mine. I have planted different types of trees including Arabian Jasmin, Brinjal, Turmeric, Gourd, Ginger, Gardenia, Coriander, Grapes, Malabar Spinach, Aloe Vera, Henna, Holy Basil, Cactus etc. to mention a few till now. However, I have bigger plans for expanding the garden in the future as well".

"This new hobby of mine came in with tons of advantages as it is ensuring that my rooftop is put to good use as now, I can cultivate various vegetables, fruits, and flowers of my choice. It has been a great way for me to pass my leisure hours and combat boredom. Meanwhile, I no longer have to rely on store-bought pricy fruits and vegetables, which has a high content of pesticide, synthetic fertilizers, preservatives, and harmful chemicals. Knowing the source of the food, my



family can enjoy organic freshly-produced quality foods, which are saving us money as well", added she.

The benefits are many. The very act of gardening can help in relaxing by relieving stress or pandemic tension, improving our physical and mental well-being while boosting economic, recreational, and environmental benefits. Additionally, some get to opt for selling off surplus produce on the local shop within a year or two fulfilling the need



of their family. The process of gardening changed even for those who have been practising it before pandemic brought most of our activities to a standstill. They are getting some helping hands from family members also stuck, giving them the option to try new methods for urban horticulture and strengthen family bonds as well.

Ismat Ara, a housewife and a longtime rooftop gardener, shared with us how the pandemic has changed the experience for

her in terms of rooftop gardening. She noted, "Although I started doing this long before the onset of the pandemic, seeing my family members being interested in this makes me happy and gives me joy. Moreover, growing, nurturing and enjoying fruits like Guava, Mango or Pomegranate still remains as a bonus where my family members are involved in the process of creating a green space to feel closer to nature by occupying their free time tending to vegetables and fruits - an activity worth doing instead of being constantly busy on electronic devices. I would certainly encourage others - who have access to roofs - to try rooftop gardening and utilize the spare space while taking necessary precautionary measures. Trees can help save the planet, so we need more of them".

Roof Gardens can reduce carbon footprint, advance food security, alleviate food shortage, and ensure proper use of unused resources. Despite various practical challenges, the pandemic gave people a push to start the self-sustaining habit of rooftop gardening which gave them a chance to realize the amount of hard work that goes into getting food on the table increasing their respect for food. It also became a way for them to stay connected to nature while providing a chance for the natural sunlight or sun-ray generated Vitamin-D to bounce off their body, which improves immunity. As more people become interested in planting more trees and embracing a sustainable system of growing nutritious food, it becomes hard to refrain from acknowledging and appreciating this rare silver lining amidst the pandemic chaos.



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