



For artist-couple Fareha Zeba and Saidul Haque Juise, gardening is a passion and it all started from their tiny apartment in Hatkhola many decades ago. Now, they have renovated their three-storied family house in Uttara according to their gardening needs. Planning with architects and engineers, they extended the rooftop by adding three extensions to accommodate their collection of 13 truckloads of plants accumulated over three and a half decades.

PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

Tips for starting a roof garden

Just a note of caution, when you are opting for rooftop gardening you need to chemically treat the rooftop and make it waterproof to prevent any leakages, especially the areas where you will be planting your greens and placing the pots.

Even before you start your garden, you should consult a structural engineer to assess whether your roof can support the weight of a garden. This is an important step to ensure the safety of your home.

Before filling the earth/soil, proper arrangement for filtration, draining should be made; lightweight and well-draining soil are best choices for your rooftop garden.

As for maintenance, keeping your rooftop garden healthy and attractive is very important, and here comes the handy job of professional gardeners.

You must have a gardener for the upkeep of your rooftop garden because once you begin with a pot or two of flowers or ferns, you will itch to add a few plastic sacks for sowing vegetables and experimenting further. Soon enough it will be like an obsession to test and try seasonal vegetables, fruits, or growing rare flowering plants and such. One day you find yourself enjoying all the weeding, pruning, and fertilising to keep a happy garden. It's important to seek professional advice and assistance to ensure that it is done safely and effectively.



The wondrous world of ROOFTOP GARDENING

RAFFAT BINTE RASHID

Perhaps, there is a hidden farmer in all of us. Although suppressed under the urban rat race, many secret gardeners have decided they will create a garden, however small, within the confines of their buildings. Whether it's the rooftop, balcony, or just the window sill, these incorrigible nature lovers are all growing something — arranging a bunch of silver pothos in their chipped off mugs,

planting the roots of market bought long stem coriander in papier-mâché egg holders, or sowing saplings of aubergine and cherry tomatoes in plastic containers. There is an unmatched pleasure in reaping, however small a harvest, from your own garden.

For artist-couple Fareha Zeba and Saidul Haque Juise, gardening is a passion and it all started from their tiny apartment in Hatkhola many decades ago.

"There were only two windows facing east, where there was abundant sunlight. We managed to hang as many small pots of our favourite plants, cacti and creepers. That was our budding garden and later we had full-fledged gardens wherever we moved," says Saidul.

Now, the couple has renovated their three-storied family house in Uttara according to their gardening needs. Planning with architects and engineers, they extended the rooftop by adding three extensions to accommodate their collection of 13 truckloads of plants accumulated over three and a half decades.

For rooftop garden enthusiasts, each season has its own stories to tell. Winters are about

blushing roses, hibiscus and bougainvillea complementing by the yellow dahlias and saffron marigolds. They all spread out a picture-perfect pose on the lush canopy of green grass on rooftops. On top of that, growing winter vegetables adds a unique experience. Summer on the other hand is about fragrant white gardenias, frangipanis, and lilies.

"Living around green fills our minds with peace and calmness," says Saidul. "It is all the therapy we need to thrive. Our romance with gardens is the soul food of our artistic inclination. Where will I get to see bees collecting honey or making small hives, a pair of doves making a nest in one of our bushes and fearlessly drinking from our water ponds, or even daring to catch a few guppies from there?" ponders the nature lover who keeps a very meticulously maintained rooftop garden.

Since the coronavirus outbreak back in 2020, many city dwellers resorted to rooftop gardening as a form of therapeutic relief and the government's offer of a 10 percent reduction on holding tax for property owners to grow rooftop gardens added fuel to this new

all bringing in that provincial flavour to our modern apartments.

"Would you believe it if I said the tomatoes I grow on my rooftop taste completely different from the ones in the bazaar? Long beans — freshly plucked from the vine — steamed along with boiling rice and mashed in mustard oil tastes great. We have even dared to make 'chal kumra morobba' (candied wax gourd) for my mother. And all these came from our rooftop!" said Saidul.

During his school days, Saidul explained, they had mandatory gardening classes and the love for nature was ingrained in them ever since.

Rohena Islam, is another garden enthusiast, who, despite her busy schedule, working for a private organisation, finds time to maintain a rooftop garden.

"Our children are completely removed from nature. They are stuck home under piles of textbooks. I taught my child from an early age that the plants in our house are like his siblings and if you tear their leaves they will be hurt," said Rohena.



Know your fertilisers

An important tip to remember is the know-how of using fertilisers. It must be of perfect ratio and the right amount or portion must be applied depending on the size of the plant, shrub or tree. Gardeners prefer to use manure, like cow dung, as fertiliser. It is said to provide the much-needed nutrients suitable for plant growth. It has 3 per cent nitrogen, 2 percent phosphorus, and 1 percent potassium, making it the perfect fertiliser for almost all types of plants and crops; it also balances the soil organically.

Another choice of organic manure is by decomposing dried leaves, fruit skin, egg shells, and any kitchen waste that is organic.



(L) Growing winter vegetables on rooftops adds a unique experience. Summer on the other hand is about fragrant white gardenias, frangipanis, and lilies. (R) For rooftop garden enthusiasts, each season has its own stories to tell. Winters are about blushing roses, hibiscus and bougainvillea complementing by the yellow dahlias and saffron marigolds. They all spread out a picture-perfect pose on the lush canopy of green grass on rooftops.

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found hobby of high-rise building owners.

To cater to this growing demand, there are now a number of thriving businesses of nurseries, garden accessories, tools and gardening ornaments. The trade of soil, manure and natural pesticides is at its peak.

Apart from physical nurseries the garden business is flourishing online to the extent that there are portals offering gardening solutions to offices, farm houses, and rooftop garden owners. You can order exotic plants, rare trees, herbs such as rosemary, thyme, and oregano from all across the country.

There are many gardening enthusiasts who get help from experts working online. There are even groups of like-minded garden lovers on social media platforms.

"As children, we have all been close to nature. Our mothers always maintained their kitchen gardens of green chillies, coriander, tomatoes, winter and summer vegetables in our backyards; most of us had a small flower garden on our porch. And now we are

"When we started our family life, I had nothing to decorate my house with except plants. I started propagating them in teapots, old bowls and planting some in terracotta pots. And till date my home of 30 years is still decorated with ferns and other foliage. If I do not have green around me, I suffocate. My plants are more precious than any crystal showpiece," she added.

Gardening is a full-time pursuit and a gardener will face many heartaches, but they must not despair and give up. The tests and trials are what makes gardening so therapeutic and calming.

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