

Promoting Herbal Gardens in Schools

Revitalising traditions of herbs and their use

“Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I may not remember. Involve me and I will understand.”

The medicinal and aromatic plants of the Himalayan mountains are an invaluable biological resource, closely associated with health care, cuisine, traditions, and culture. These plants have been grown or collected for thousands of years, and the traditional knowledge about the plants and their uses has been handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. But with the change in lifestyles, the younger generation is losing this knowledge. We urgently need to help young people learn about the fascinating world of herbal plants, their many uses, and the joy of seeing them grow and using them, whether in town or country.

The ‘Promoting Herbal Gardens in Schools’ initiative was started to help students, teachers, and families learn about, and recognise the importance of, the herbal plants that are part of our everyday life. At the same time, we aimed to raise awareness of the need for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity resources, particularly the medicinal and aromatic plants of the Himalayas, and what individuals can do.



The Herbal Garden Programme

The pilot initiative

The pilot initiative was launched under the auspices of the International Year of Biodiversity 2010 by ICIMOD working with the Nepal Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) and the Private and Boarding Schools Association of Nepal (PABSON); fifteen schools in the Kathmandu Valley took part. Students used their own creativity in designing and decorating the gardens, and helped by their teachers,



selected and planted medicinal and culinary herbal plants, prepared plant profiles, wrote poems and stories, prepared posters, and tried out recipes. By integrating the concept into the school curriculum, schools opened the way for continuity. (Read more at www.icimod.org/?page=1128). ICIMOD has a vision of the initiative spreading within Kathmandu, across the country, and further throughout the countries of the Himalayan region, and of children, teachers, parents, families, homes, communities, and societies, across the region revitalising the traditions associated with herbs and their uses.



Why a herbal garden?

A herbal garden reflects the long-standing tradition of conserving and using plants and plant products for health care and cooking. Some 80% of the world's people use herbs as their main form of medical treatment (WHO). There is an increasing demand for medicinal plants from the Himalayas in the global herbal market. But while herbal plants are in demand, the traditions and culture associated with them are fading. Making a herbal garden is an opportunity to grow herbs for use, while spreading knowledge of their importance and traditional uses, and saving plants that are threatened. So why not have our own little garden full of herbs?



What are herbal plants?

Herbal plants (herbs, shrubs, vines, climbers, trees) are known for their healing and/or taste properties. They include hundreds of plants used in medicine, like aloe vera, fox glove, winter cherry, aconite, serpentine, rhubarb, valerian, Himalayan yew, lemongrass, and basil. Some of these and many others are essential ingredients in cooking, such as mint, garlic, ginger, turmeric, cardamom, cinnamon, pepper, and other spices and condiments.

Join the Herbal Garden Programme

Who can be part of this initiative?

Setting up a herbal garden is fun and rewarding, and a great learning experience. We call upon everyone, individuals, schools, agencies, business houses, and local, regional, and international organisations to be part of the initiative, and contribute in any way they can to furthering the herbal garden initiative. Collective partnership is the best way to expand the concept in a wider arena.

Seven steps to making a herbal garden in your school

1. Choose a plot of at least 25 sq metres within the school premises and in the sunniest place possible.
2. Draw an outline on paper and make a plan. You will need to do some research and discuss with teachers and friends, as well as have a good imagination! Keep your design simple; think about how tall and bushy different plants will be, and how you will reach them.
3. Organise student groups and make a working schedule; discuss this with your teacher and school management.
4. Organise some garden tools, dig over the soil, and make the flower beds and paths as per the design.
5. Bring plants from the nursery, plant them adding identification tags, and nourish as needed. Your teacher or some plant experts can help you choose the best plants, and identify any you have whose names you don't know.
6. Do some research on the medicinal values of each herb in your garden, know its uses and other values, conservation status, and traditional use; prepare a short profile.
7. Talk to your friends, parents, and family about the herbal garden, ask them to visit and contribute for its maintenance; most importantly, make it one of your community service projects and ripple the fun and knowledge to other schools, homes, and the community

Herbal Poster with Recipe

The competition was held to raise awareness on the culinary use of herbs, and their medicinal properties. The schools prepared a poster depicting a recipe focusing on a particular herb and describing the method of preparation, and highlighting the herb's many values. Schools brought samples of the recipes to taste. The herbs portrayed included basil, chamomile, coriander, garlic, lemon grass, mint, oregano, and many others.



Make learning fun...

Motivation, enthusiasm, and appreciation go a long way! Motivate children by putting the school garden into some kind of competition. Appreciate every small effort. Think about other creative projects around the herbal gardens such as stories, poems, drawings, recipes, posters, and profiles. Encourage children to visit gardens in other schools and let them exchange ideas. Talk to elderly people in the villages and ask how they have been using the plants. Regularly monitor your garden to keep it growing and evolving.

ICIMOD has handed over ownership of the 'Promoting Herbal Gardens' programme to the schools involved. If you are interested in setting up a herbal garden in your school, contact one of the seven winning schools to ask about their experience. ICIMOD will also be able to provide limited technical advice.

The Seven Winning Schools

Aims Academy

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Annal Jyoti Boarding School

annaljyoti@mail.com

Loyalty Academy

paudelarun@hotmail.com

Rato Bangala School

rbs@mos.com.np

Suryodaya Jyoti Secondary School

schoolsuryodaya@gmail.com

Ullens School

poonam@ullens.edu.np

Vajra Academy

achalathapa2009@gmail.com



Herbal Garden Tips

Growing herbs is fun. You can get plenty of herbs if you do the following.

- Give your herbs plenty of sun, but protect them from very strong sun.
- Use a well drained soft soil with lots of leafy organic manure (make a compost heap so you can keep the soil healthy).
- Keep the soil moist but not waterlogged; wait until the topsoil is dry before watering; make sure there is good drainage.
- Weed regularly to give the herbs space to grow. Check for pests and disease.
- Harvest carefully so as not to damage the plant or hamper its growth.



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