

Community Gardening

Presentation by Mrs Sangeetha Sriram on 27-4-2013 at AUETAA HOUSE

Everything is connected to everything else. This is the First law of Ecology. One of the important reasons for the present civilisation crisis is because of the "This disconnect from nature" and "isolation from community" says Mrs Sangeetha Sriram who gave us a presentation about Community gardening on the 27'th April at our AUETAA club. Community gardening simply means collectively cultivating gardens on public lands, it could be on private land where a group of neighbours/friends could do gardening together.

Community gardens are spaces for connecting to nature as well as people and when people get introduced to nature's way of farming it seems to have a profound effect on the way they approach life itself. People learn to become more patient, more respectful of life, be receptive, be more humble, observe and tune into life's intelligence at work. Amazing conversations happen while gardening. Connecting with nature develops creativity and intuition.

Gardening together invariably opens up the space to connect over a creative and meaningful process. It build community and deepens relationships. Gardening is also therapeutic, there is much to learn about soil, plants and insects. It gives the opportunity to offer the labour and love to grow food an important part of service !!

In the presentation after telling us what are community gardens and why community gardens, Sangeetha went on to explain about permaculture an approach to gardening nature's way. Permaculture design ethics include care of the earth, care of people and other species, limiting consumption and sharing surplus. (earth care, people care and fair share) Sangeetha has written a book called "pasumai puratchiyin kathai" and is a founder - volunteer of "Restore" an organic food retailer.

Here are some of most important reasons for our present day civilisational crisis. We are becoming disconnected from nature. We are becoming isolated from community. We are commodifying essential life knowledge. We are giving our power to decide our life choices to corporations whose primary interest is profit-making. We at reStore Gardens (an initiative of reStore) believe that 'Community Gardening' is a generative response to all of these.

Community Gardening simply means collectively growing gardens on public lands

(sometimes private lands given to us for this purpose). We currently have three such gardens in Chennai. Each of the following initiatives is placed in a different context. The first is in the paediatric ward of the Adyar Cancer Institute. The second is in a children's centre at the Urur Kuppam, Besant Nagar. The third is the private frontyard in Kottivakkam, opened up to a community of gardeners from the neighbourhood. People come together voluntarily to share their love, labour and resources to grow edible gardens yielding vegetables, herbs, fruits and flowers.

We don't have a blueprint for these gardens but would love to see them grow organically. But we do have a vision. And that is to reclaim urban commons to grow aesthetic edible gardens to heal ourselves and our urban society in many ways.

- * Gardening together invariably opens up the space to connect over a creative and meaningful process. It builds community and deepens relationships.

- * It is therapeutic.

- * It is educational. There is so much to learn from each other, as well as from the soil, plants and insects.

- * It gives us the opportunity to offer our labour and love to grow food, an important act of service!

- * We would like to make the fresh, nutritious and safe harvests (from our community gardens) more easily accessible to those who cannot easily afford it.