

My city Delhi

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There is a crying need for more trees and parks.

PHOTO: S. SUBRAMANIAM



RUTHLESS: Disappearing green.

Delhi's summer has arrived. Posh colonies of South Delhi are already experiencing severe water shortages. The temperature is rising steadily and soon it will be scorching. It is at this time of the year, that the need for trees is felt; whether one is walking, shopping or waiting for a bus. While parking the car, we try and park it under the shade of a tree. But most of the trees have been ruthlessly lopped during the short winter and they have not been able to grow new branches as yet.

Many trees like the Gulmohar do not recover if they are lopped. Trees gasp for air when their trunk base has been cemented. The root systems weaken and the tree topples over unable to bear the weight of its crown on windy days.

For our well-being

Psychologists say that open spaces are very important for our mental and physical well-being. But how much importance do we place on the need for trees and parks? Trees that take almost 50 years to grow are chopped off so that roads can be widened. With land prices skyrocketing, open spaces are considered worthless unless they can be put to commercial use. So spaces in parks and gardens are built up and shops and recreational facilities are created and green space gets reduced.

Then walkways and fountains are installed by spending large sums of money. The undergrowth and bushes are cleared and ornamental shrubs planted. In most cases the tree species planted are also not natives.

Many gardens in Delhi are being planted with just the Ashok and palm species. These trees do not attract as many birds as compared to local species. As we all know, birds enrich our lives and enliven the city environs.

Tree cover

Berries and fruits, edible flowers, herbs, tender grass shoots and grains, nectar and bark attract birds. Roosting and nesting birds require a combination of ground covers, thorny shrubs and bushes, thick creepers and vines and large trees. Eagles, kites and crows build their nests on large trees that are exposed to the sky. Doves look out for creepers and thickets whereas sparrows and bulbuls nest in shrubs. Their nests have to be concealed from predatory birds.

So a park or a garden has to have a combination of grassy land, undergrowth, shrubs, creepers and trees of the appropriate mix. Native trees and bushes do not need much care whereas ornamental plants and trees need regular upkeep and watering. So let us leave nature to perform its functions free of cost rather than to have open spaces that require huge budgets for maintenance.

In collaboration with Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group