

**Doon Watch Nature Series for Dehradun Live Hindustan Times
by Sanjay Sondhi**

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Gimme Yellow!

Spring is in the air! In our unkempt garden, the first signs of green shoots are visible everywhere. The fig tree, which has been leafless, for a few months, is now sprouting a few green leaves. Fresh, green leaves are visible on many other plants, too. Despite the odd rainy day, bright sunshine has lifted everyone's mood, including visiting wildlife.

Nothing reflects the onset of spring better than the mustard flowers in our garden. A splash of bright yellow flowers greets us each time we step into our garden. The fresh green leaves, the white blossoms of the plum tree, the last remnants of the golden-yellow flowers of *Gainda* (or Marigold) and the "gimme yellow" mustard flowers provides hues in the garden that are to die for. With the gorgeous hills of Mussoorie in the background, snow-clad on quite a few occasions in the past month, what more can one ask for.



The flowering mustard (*sarson* in Hindi) is not only a pleasing balm to the eyes, but it has helped fill our stomachs, too! On quite a few occasions in the last month, *makki ki roti* and freshly-plucked mustard leaves made into *sarson ka saag* along with *gur* has been on our lunch menu. Yummy! Bright sunshine, a garden sit-out, accompanied by the chirps of birds, flitting butterflies, the odd curious mongoose and satisfied burps from yours truly completes the picture of bliss!

Watching us, nature, too has joined in the festivities involving mustard. Grass yellows and cabbage white butterflies regularly feed on the nectar from the mustard flowers. Bees buzz around the flowers, partaking its nectar and pollinating the flowers in return. Just the other day, I spotted a cabbage white butterfly lay its eggs on the mustard plant. In a few weeks, the green caterpillar of the cabbage white butterfly will emerge, and it, too, will feast on the mustard leaves.

The seed pods of mustard are just beginning to develop. A few days ago, a flock of Yellow-breasted Greenfinches, birds that love to feed on mustard seeds, visited to check out whether the seed pods were ready for the taking. Not ready yet, they seemed to say, after a round of inspection. They will probably return in a week or two to gorge on the mustard seeds. When that happens, I put off the music, and listen, instead, to the twittering greenfinches in the garden.

The sights and sounds of spring in our home garden gladdens the heart. And I feel good that we picked Dehradun as our home a decade ago. Now, if only, we can keep it this way.....

Feedback on this column is welcome at sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com

Making a difference: *Sarson ka saag*, broccoli, tomatoes, onions, cabbage, *bhindi*... all these and more grow in our home garden. Garden-fresh vegetables are not only healthy, but also free of pesticides and chemical fertilisers. Its time for you to grow your own vegetables and fruits at home, don't you think?

Photograph caption: Mustard flowers in our home garden

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