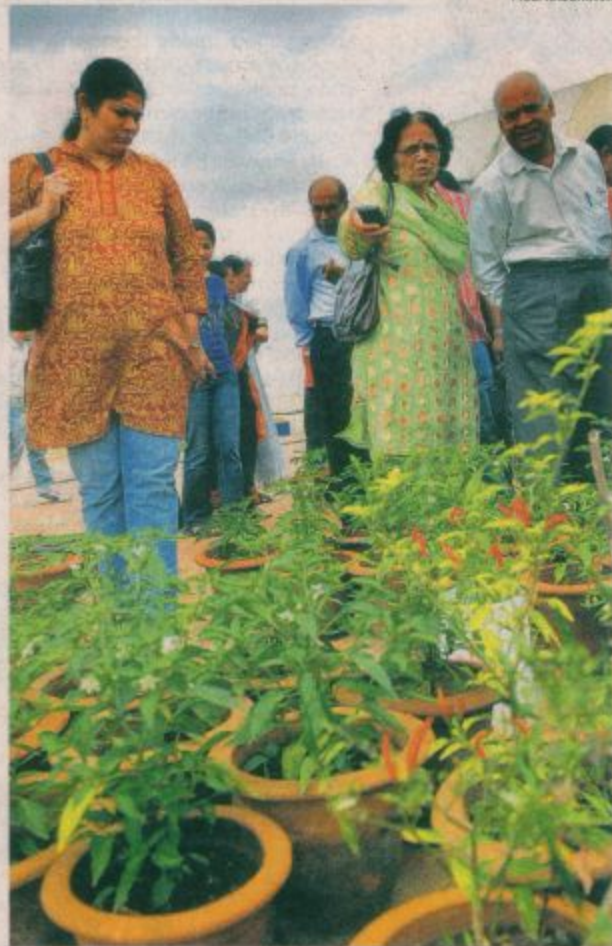


Chemical warfare

The Vittal Mallya Scientific Research Foundation, a non-profit research and development organisation, helps ordinary people combat the effects of toxic pesticide by encouraging them to grow their own organic food

PICS: KAUSHIK JN



Participants of a workshop inspect chillies grown in pots on the terrace at Vittal Mallya Scientific Research Foundation in BTM Layout

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Pesticide, as the name suggests, is designed to kill. But too often, chemical pesticides harm more than their intended targets. Only a few weeks ago, 10 peacocks died after consuming pesticide-mixed water in a village near Nizamabad. A crop of paddy wilted due to an overdose of chemical fertilizer and the horror stories of the effects of Endosulfan on humans still trickle through. The scary part is that high levels of toxic pesticide still end up on our plates.

The Vittal Mallya Scientific Research Foundation (VMSRF), a non-profit, globally-competitive research and development organisation, helps people combat the extensive use of pesticide by tackling the problem in their own homes. The foundation encourages ordinary people to grow their own organic food and puts the collective wealth of knowledge of its scientists at the disposal of the public. Last week, VMSRF, together with BANGALORE MIRROR and Garden City Farmers Trust, had conducted workshops for more than 100 Earth Warriors over two days, passing on knowledge it had gained through countless hours of research.

Dr Anil Kush, CEO of the foundation, said, "We are a bunch of crazy scientists dedicated to combating the crazy use of pesticide in our food. In the process, we make everybody's thumb greener."

VMSRF conducts research in several fields from agriculture to biotechnology to biofuel and non-toxic pest control. About three years ago it began organising weekend workshops on terrace gardening. Seats were limited to 20 persons, but what encouraged



Dr Anil Kush

the scientists was that 80 per cent of those who signed up were below 40 years of age.

"It's not necessary to have a green thumb or to have had prior experience in gardening to sign up," Kush said. "VMSRF takes people through the entire process from scratch. Participants are also put through practical classes and it's not a one-off process; participants are encouraged to return and clear doubts."

In its more than 20 years of existence, VMSRF has contributed significantly to global medicine, healthcare, human and animal nutrition, agri-biotech, organic farming and environmental sciences. It retails several pest control products at their premises in BTM Layout. All products meet strict standards of the US Environmental Protection Agency as well as the Central Insecticide Board in India.

Kush admits it's near impossible to do away entirely with the use of chemical pesticide, but the use of toxic pesticide could be reduced to negligible levels.

TOOTA FROM YOUR THOTA MELA

On World Kitchen Garden Day, Bangalore Mirror Earth Warriors joins hands with Garden City Farmers Trust in conducting 'Toota from your Thota' mela that will bring together all terrace gardeners under one roof. An exhibition of garden equipment, seeds, compost, vegetables, food counters and more would also be held to help budding terrace gardeners.

When: Sunday, Aug 26

Where: Shree Ramana Maharishi Academy For The Blind, CA-1B, 3rd Cross, 3rd Phase, JP Nagar.

Time: 10am - 5pm

"If you travel to Kolar from where the city receives much of its supply of fruit and vegetables, you would find farmers dipping produce in chemical pesticide. I call it the 'Holy Dip'. This is to increase the shelf life of their produce, but the shelf life of organically-grown produce is just as long. There is growing awareness of the harmful effects of toxic pesticide. At VMSRF, we create a knowledge value chain and the good thing is it's all under one roof. So if someone who is into producing better quality seeds wants to clear doubts on non-toxic pesticide it's as simple as walking across the room."

While awareness is growing, Kush believes there is still an 'imbalance'.

"We aren't harvesting this knowledge capital. For example, everybody talks about the benefits of neem. It's a one-stop solution for a range of problems. Yet how many of us actually go out and plant a neem tree? We need to bring in some balance and we at VMSRF strive to achieve that."

To register yourself as an Earth Warrior, log on to www.bangaloremirror.com. To send us your stories/blogs, or to tell us about your green crusade, write to earthwarriors@indiatimes.com. If you have queries on environmental issues, write to earthexpert@indiatimes.com.