



KUNAL MANIAR

Adding greenery to patios adds vibrancy to the house



MANGESH LUNGARE

A balcony redesign

Go green to battle the blues

Upscaling balconies and patios into home gardens can soothe the craving to be closer to nature amidst the lockdown

SHALKIE

 The ongoing pandemic has forced people to practice social distancing within the four walls of their urban accommodations. With strict rules prohibiting people to take jaunts in nature, or even a short stroll through a park out of fear of contamination, there has been a renewed desire for experiencing the outdoors. So in the space-crunched metropolitan homes in concretised boroughs, converting balconies and patios into full-fledged urban-gardens can be just the passion-project one needs right now.

As actress Anushka Sharma illustrated last week, not only can a balcony flowing with houseplants help one escape the pandemic dread, but it also gives one a much-needed dose of greenery. "Amidst the current crisis, the balcony transformation project can be fun. You will be able to convert the once-neglected space into a purposeful, cosy, and cheerful den for you and your family. All you need is some creativity," says Pankaj Poddar, co-founder of Hipcouch, an interior design company.

ECONOMISING THE SPACE

To start, one needs to do a sunlight analysis for growing plants in the balcony. The best sunlight that plants can get will be in the North-East direction, so one needs to work that out in addition to considering other factors such as water drainage. Since the limited spatial configuration is the biggest challenge of this upscale project, one needs to make the most of the available space, including the overhangs and walls. "Keeping the overhangs in mind, try to suspend pots from the upper ceiling and have something hanging from it. You also have a big advantage in the sidewall. Try growing creep-



Anushka Sharma looking after her houseplants

HOUSEPLANTS & BENEFITS

Adding variety to your home garden, Mangesh Lungare suggests the following plants according to their benefits:

-  1. Philodendron — Brings natural beauty to your living space.
-  2. Philodendron Congo var big leaf — Proven to reduce Carbon Dioxide
-  3. Phoenix roebelenii — Proven to reduce stress.
-  4. Lantana Camara — Acts like a little oxygen factory, absorbing toxins from the air
-  5. Asparagus — Adds character

MANGESH LUNGARE



An indoor houseplant



For beginners, I recommend growing flower or fruit-bearing plants, as people get excited to see that their plants are bearing the fruit of their efforts

— KUNAL MANIAR

ers on the wall to take advantage of the verticality so that your floor space can relatively be left free," suggests landscape architect Kunal Maniar.

Further, incorporating plants in the other nooks and corners of the house also adds to the vibrancy. "Place the potted

plants on the side table height to avoid compromising with storage space. If one doesn't get enough sunlight indoors, you can regularly swap the plants from the balcony to interior spaces and vice-versa," says interior and architectural designer Mangesh Lungare.

HOLISTIC SELECTION

Choosing plants for your indoor oasis is the most exciting part of this endeavour. While selecting climate-tolerant plants for sustainability, or aesthetic plants for décor aspirations are important, one must start by making decisions keeping in mind the holistic

growth. "For people who are starting, I would recommend growing flower or fruit-bearing plants, as people get excited to see that their plants are bearing the fruit of their efforts. Aesthetically good-looking plants for the first-timers get boring as they will look the same on Day 60 as they did on Day 1," Maniar explains.

Having a connection with the plants is essential to be in sync with nature. Therefore, to be able to properly nurture plants, one needs to aspire for a symbiotic relationship. "If one is a tea drinker, I would recommend growing lemongrass and mint because there cannot be a more refreshing moment than one waking up in the morning, going into the balcony, plucking lemongrass or mint leaves and making tea for oneself. It will connect them to the plant because it is giving back something to you almost in the manner of a ritual," he adds.

Similarly, Raat ki Raani can make a good option for its nocturnal fragrance. Moreover, one can also grow oxygen-enhancing plants such as Areca Palm and Sansevieria or even building an organic kitchen garden by planting saplings of herbs, cherry tomatoes, lettuce, and herbs such as oregano, cilantro, sage, parsley, and others. "Considering the situation, one can try some home gardening. Try growing microgreens by germinating pulses and then transferring them to a planter. The idea of being organic is growing, so why not get along and plant your herbs and greens in your patios? This will not only add greenery but colour and freshness to your balcony as well. You can also get innovative with things like mailboxes and tin cans. You get a lovely plant for your balcony and a nutritious meal later," says Poddar.