

Good earth

(clockwise from top)
The first Miyawaki forest at Puliyarakonam after four years; MR Hari with Akira Miyawaki; frogs are among the many animals that have found a home in the young forest. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



How green is my hill

Hari MR, who led the efforts to create a Miyawaki forest, hopes to inspire others by training people who want to follow the model



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Leaves glitter with raindrops and an occasional breeze sprinkles droplets on us while walking under a canopy of verdant greenery. The Karamana river, in full spate, can be heard raging about 750 metres below. The air is redolent with fragrances of the soil, leaves, spices and flowers that grow in abundance. Creepers, branches and leaves brush against us as we make our way around this tropical Eden. Butterflies glide among the ixora, making the most of the weak sunshine, a green frog hops under a stone, and a fat brown millipede moves forward busily.

As I carefully make my way around Miyawaki Nature Lab, Gayathri Devi, my guide for the day, shows me the variety of plants that have greened this once barren hill within

six years.

When MR Hari, CEO of Invis Multimedia, sold his ancestral property in 2007, he invested it in a hillside plot of two acres near Puliyarakonam, nearly 15 kilometres from the city. The monsoon had denuded the area of its topsoil and no amount of tree planting helped in arresting the water from draining away from the hillside. Hari recalls planting 500 saplings every year only to see them wither away as the rocky and pebbly red soil could not retain water.

Hari began rearing cows and hens to see if the land could be fertilised with organic manure. He was clear that he did not want to use any chemicals to replenish the soil.

In 2015, Hari came across a



Urban micro forests could... check water logging... and bring back Nature to concrete jungles

MR HARI
Entrepreneur



video on Miyawaki planting, a method of restoring forests pioneered by Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki. He

had spent a lifetime specialising in restoring degraded land by growing native vegetation.

So, in 2017, Hari began experimenting with the Miyawaki model on a small plot on his property.

Thrilled to notice the

change in the growth of the plants, Hari travelled to Japan to meet Miyawaki in 2019, who was then in his nineties. "I was able to connect with his team. They travelled to Kerala and advised me on the system of planting advocated by Miyawaki."

According to Miyawaki, forests nurture pesticides to protect themselves or attract predators that feed on the pests. Leaves, insects and bird droppings enrich the soil.

"Micro forests are apt to combat climate change and urban micro forests could be a powerful tool to check water logging, rising temperatures and bring back Nature to concrete jungles," he says.

He continues: "I call this place a nature lab because it is an ideal place for those interested in the environment to see how the soil changes. I plan to conduct a five-day hands-on-training programme to show how the soil gets depleted and how it can be replenished naturally by the plants."

Batches of students from Kerala and Karnataka have come to study how the barren place has been transformed.

Hari was selected as consultant of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

"I am part of a mission to plant Miyawaki forests in one million schools all around the world. We planted one on the premises of the Kudankulam Nuclear Plant in Tamil Nadu and is on a mission to create such micro forests in Rajasthan, Orissa and Maharashtra," he says.

This is in addition to 150-200 such forests in Kerala. He believes that if residents create one-to-two-cent forests within their plots, groundwater can be recharged in cities. He asserts that such Miyawaki forests composed of local plants can help restore rivers and protect coastal areas.