

# Into the Wild

Author - Vinutha Mallya, Published on - 18.9.2017

Experience the diversity of forest-grown veggies and their recipes at a rural food festival



[The Wild Vegetables Festival has been held annually for three years](#) Junk food is gaining a presence on the plates of forest-dwelling tribes, who hitherto depended only on forest produce for their nutritional needs. When the market became more accessible to tribal people, who were doing better economically, and with the youngsters coming to cities for education, their food habits began to be transformed. "There is a feeling among youngsters that their culture is inferior and that their food is inferior," said Pradeep Chavan, of Kalpavriksh, the city-based organisation that works on environmental and social issues. "Food from the forest has no pesticides or chemicals, and has many medicinal properties. Intake of forest vegetables has kept the tribal people in good health," he said. The diversity of vegetables is best experienced during the monsoon season, when a wide variety of plants grow wild in the forest.

Chavan manages Kalpavriksh's efforts at participatory conservation and livelihoods in the tribal villages near Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary, in Khed taluka of Pune district. The area includes Bhorgiri, Bhivegaon, Bhomale and Kharpuj villages. The concern that their healthy diet was being edged out, emerged during discussions with the community women, Chavan said. "The women discussed the pros and cons of the dietary changes that were affecting their community. When they decided to do something about it, we considered it our responsibility to take it up," said Chavan, adding that Kalpavriksh has been working in Bhimashankar area for 10 years. The idea of Wild Vegetables Festival was thus conceived to showcase vegetables from the forests and cook them with traditional tribal recipes. "The main objective behind this is to celebrate wild/uncultivated food and to generate greater awareness and pride among the local youth, school kids and villagers about the nutritional and medicinal values of this," he added.

The Wild Vegetables Festival has been annually held for the last three years. "This is the first year that we have promoted the festival, to invite outsiders to experience the food over lunch, for a small fee," said Suresh Bhokte of Kharpuj village, adding, "About 40 vegetables will be displayed, and more than 40 dishes of traditional recipes will be served, made by the women". The forest-grown vegetables like kurdu, chichardi, halunda, chaya, kombhal, kavdar, teryachi bhaji, kathe math etc. will be displayed, cooked, and some would be sold too. The tribal villagers will also set up stalls from where visitors can purchase forest produce like honey, rice, millets (ragi/nachini), and even papads made by the women's self-help groups. The festival is spread over three Sundays this month, in three different locations: Bhivegaon (Sep 10), Kharpuj (Sep 17) and Bhomale (Sep 24).

The events provide a source of income to women, said Bhokte, adding that they hope to raise Rs 20,000–25,000 at this festival, which will cover their costs and leave something for organisational expenses. "In Kharpuj, we are expecting 400–500 people this year. A group of 100 doctors from Pune will be among them," Bhokte said. Inviting more city-dwellers to attend the festival, he said, "People should make a day-trip out of it, come to our villages, eat the freshly made food and have fun."

WHERE: Bivegaon, Kharpuj, Bhomale, near Rajgurunagar (Khed)

WHEN: September 10, 17, 24, 10:30 am onwards

CALL: 9552809784/9405438180 and 9890001568 (for Kharpuj)

COST: Rs 150 First published by Pune Mirror Watch

video clip from Kharpuj Wild Food Festival 2017