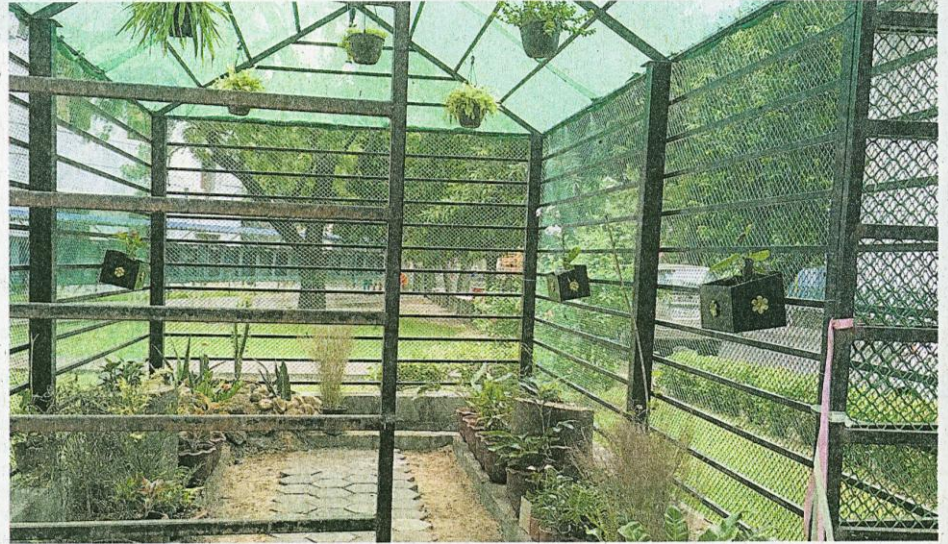


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More than a patch of green

Stella Maris College recently inaugurated their own little greenhouse replete with a variety of plants and a rock garden



■ PREETI ZACHARIAH

It is raining outside when I arrive at the Stella Maris College in Chennai; a cold, steady drizzle that has turned the earth to mush and left behind a slight nip in the air. Inside the recently constructed greenhouse, however, a bright green mesh keeps both the cold and rain at bay. “That is the point of the greenhouse,” explains Nirmala Kanagaraj, VP and senior faculty at the college’s Botany department, who has worked closely on this project. “It is a way to grow plants in a controlled micro-environment by optimising key factors such as temperature, light, shade and humidity,” she says, pointing out that gases trapped in the greenhouse control temperature. And yes, since the Greenhouse is completely watered by a water-efficient Mist System, “We do not need to pour water at all, minimising wastage,” she says.

Greenhouses have been around for a long time: legend says that the concept came into being when the ancient Roman emperor, Tiberius wanted to have fresh cucumbers available at all times. The first true greenhouse apparently came into being during the 13th Century, also



How does your garden grow In the greenhouse

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in Italy and soon spread all over Europe. From Versailles to England’s Palm House at Kew and one constructed at Mount Vernon by George Washington, greenhouses have always been a place to nurture exotic and delicate plants.

Sponsored by the Rotary Club of Madras East RID-3232 and Priscilla Kumar, former associate professor of Botany, Stella’s Greenhouse was inaugurated by the college on October 11.

“It was her (Kumar’s) retirement gift to us,” says Kanagaraj.

The project, from the creation of base concrete to the actual placing of plants, took about five months to accomplish, she says and cost over ₹1 lakh. “We have sourced plants from all over the city,” she says.

Walking around the small space, Kanagaraj reels off their names. *Nilavembu*, a natural antipyretic herb, often used to treat dengue; orchids with their waxy leaves and jewel-hued flowers; Anthurium of the stippled spadix and single fleshy petal; lace-like fern with spore-speckled undersides. A few more pots dangle from the ceiling, fern and creepers spilling out of them. A miniature rock garden from whose crevices peek numerous succulent plants, occupies a corner of the structure.

“It is built at a natural gradient to prevent accumulation of water,” says Kanagaraj.

Admittedly, the project is in its fledgling stages, but they have big plans. “Greenhouses can cover half a basketball court. We hope to expand and make it a full-fledged one,” says Kanagaraj, pointing out that this is great way to protect plants and crops from natural disasters.

“We hope to cultivate vegetables soon,” she smiles.

