

## **French botanist Patrick Blanc to create vertical garden in Kochi**



Well-known French botanist Patrick Blanc will create a vertical garden here for the Kochi Muziris Biennale, which will be the second one he has made in India.

The first was nearly ten years ago at the French embassy in New Delhi. "And that is not open to the public," said the colourful Frenchman, dressed in a leafy patterned shirt and with hair dyed green.

In all, Blanc, 61 has created more than 250 vertical gardens at prestigious addresses around the world.

Speaking at the Kochi Biennale Foundation's Let's Talk event at the St Teresa's College auditorium here yesterday, Blanc took the audience through a presentation of his gravity-defying gardens around the world. They are the ideal green stretches for crowded cities which cannot afford the luxury of spacious gardens, he said.

Blanc hopes that his Biennale installation in Veli gardens here will be a permanent work that evolves into something useful over the years. The Veli gardens was chosen as the location for his work because it was originally the place where the study for the plant tome Hortus Malabaricus took place in the 17th century.

"For a start, I will use the plants that I find in local nurseries," said Blanc, who uses anything from 100 to 450 species in his gardens. "I hope we can then slowly introduce native plants, which we also help to propagate. This would be a great learning ground for the local people and to visitors to the region."

Blanc remembers going around the Nilgris, Munnar and Periyar a decade back and loving the bio-diversity. "Kerala and India, probably has the largest variety of Impatiens in the world,"

Blanc pointed out. “I found a range of colours and a variety with only one leaf, which I have not seen propagated anywhere.”

Though the vertical gardens provide insulation against pollution and the radiation generated in cities, green architect and Padma Shri awardee G Shankar, who participated in the event along with former Kochi Mayor and Town Planning Committee Chairman K J Sohan, wondered about the environmental viability of the “mind-boggling” project in Kerala’s humidity.

On his site visit to the Veli gardens, Blanc, who began tinkering with the idea of the vertical gardens as a teenager, felt that the Kerala climate would be well-suited to his creation.

Sohan suggested that Blanc’s installation should be a tribute to spices and to pepper, the vertical plant that attracted traders to Kerala’s shores centuries back and changed the course of history.