

ECOLOGIC

Garbage Gets Strays, Both Food & Plastic

Only way to reduce scavenging by animals is to reduce your individual 'waste' footprints. Start by avoiding bottled water



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In the Blue Mountains (Nilgiris), gentle elephants amidst verdant green meadows — that is the fond memory of many summer vacations in the Nilgiris.

That memory is threatened by mountains of garbage that elephants are feeding on in Gudalur.

The viral photo doing the rounds in the media this past week is a reality check on our waste footprint. This reality hits close to home as well. Every city's outskirts is dotted with garbage and litter which we cannot seem to get rid of. Packing materials alone is huge and accounts for thirty five to fifty percent of the waste in most countries.

Plastic, non-biodegradable materials and litter pollutes and alters the chemical and biological properties of soil and groundwater. The Swachh Bharat mission focuses on the improvement of sanitation conditions, but enough is not being said about the effect of pollution on the environment



Cows dig in the waste to find their supper

and soil.

Open dumping of waste causes soil degradation which directly impacts the plants growing on it and water beneath it. In the Nil-

giris, it is even adversely affecting wildlife. Unplanned growth and rapid urbanisation fuels the uncontrollable menace. Municipal solid waste (MSW) normally

termed as "garbage" or "trash" is an inevitable byproduct of human activity! Often open dumpsites are due to low budgets for waste disposal and non-availability of

trained manpower. Open dumping of MSW is a common practice in most cities in our country and other nations in our region. As in any eco-system, nature finds a way to complete the cycle — open dumping leads to scavenging by animals!

Another passion of mine includes animal welfare dealing with urban strays (mostly dogs and cows). Even in cities these animals rely on dumpsites for their daily meals — they rummage through bags to find vegetable peels and kitchen wastes.

Very often they eat the whole bag, plastic and all! We are haunted by rampant garbage dumps and the quality of life of future generations is seriously threatened. The way to minimise soil pollution and the problem of open dumping is to focus on reducing individual 'waste' footprints. The less we send out to municipal local dumps, the more we save the soil, water, vegetation and wildlife. For a start avoid buying bottled water!

In your kitchen install a charcoal filter with an Ultraviolet unit to produce drinking water from the Corporation water or well water. Use metal or glass bottles instead of PET bottles.

Think re-usable instead of disposable! Cleaning cloths instead of paper towels, cloth napkins instead of paper, jute bags instead of plastic and even cloth diapers instead of the usual disposable type! Start composting organic waste. Never buy plastic garbage bags — segregate waste, recycle and compost as an everyday routine. Convenience is killing our country with so much garbage. The numbers on wastes are staggering and the problems are overwhelming; but we needn't feel hopeless, give up or just continue to be part of the problem. Let us pledge to reduce our waste footprint- at our homes and offices. Oh yes, you can make a huge difference!

(The writer is an architect, urban designer, dancer and chief designer at Shilpa Architects)