

# Sikh Environment Day Toolkit

MARCH 14<sup>th</sup>, Sikh Environment Day

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## 1: Kirtan

Inform your Raagi Jatha at least two weeks in advance (by March 1) that Sikhs worldwide will focus kirtan on the environment for Gurgaddhi Diwas of Guru Har Rai Ji. You can find suggested shabads on the environment titled [Eak Bageecha](#)<sup>1</sup> on the EcoSikh website. Your Raagi Jatha can use this compilation as guidance or choose a shabad of their choice from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. Themes for shabads during this week should involve: Nature, including trees, plants, animals and farming; the Oneness of Creation; Earth as a place to practice Truth; and the importance of Caring for All.

## 2: Katha

Kathawachaks should relate shabads to the environment in katha, so the sangat can reflect on the Sikhs' relationship with *kudrat* according to Gurbani. Here are some possible topics:

*Gurbani:* Kathawachaks can do katha on any environmental

shabad on the environment from Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, the Eak Bageecha compilation, or their own choice.

*Sikh Gurus:* Sri Guru Nanak and organic farming (*Uttam Kheti*) in the last twenty years of his life at Kartarpur Sahib; Sri Guru Har Rai and the story of the flower and his animal sanctuary; historical gardens developed by Sikh Gurus like *Guru Ke Bagh*; Sikh historical events of horses in Guru Ji's army; the tenth Master Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji and his *Baaz* which is on the verge of extinction; respect of animals in Guru Ji's time, and today.

*Sikh History:* learning about the lives of Gursikhs can help root our concern for the environment in Sikh history. Historical stories include that of Baba Buddha Ji in his farms when Mata Ganga Ji went to him for blessings; *Hatheen Kirt Karni*, Bhai Gulaba Ji; the true stories of Bhagat Puran Singh Ji – his social and environmental work and writings, and the organic farms that carry his name; Bhai Vir Singh Ji and his poetry celebrating nature.

*Punjab's Environment:* topics include the rise of organic farming and sustainable agriculture; the reduction and safe disposal of chemical waste; Punj-Ab, a cry of five rivers; Baba Seechewal and his work to clean up the Kali Bein River; Baba Sewa Singh Ji and his forestation work in Amritsar district; groundwater situation and the safe water crisis in Punjab; loss of indigenous trees in Punjab (or in the neighbourhood of your gurdwara); food choices that are kind to the earth (organic/low pesticide), kind to people (fair trade) and kind to animals (free range etc); the wildlife trade.

*Healthy Lifestyle:* Choosing organic, pesticide-free or low pesticide food; modifying of plant DNA/loss of biodiversity and what that means; the impact of food adulteration and junk food;

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ecosikh.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Eak-bageechaE.pdf>

the benefits of a healthy homely diet; water saving, recycling, and eco-techniques for Sikh homes, offices and Gurdwaras.

### **3: Children's Activities**

Involving children in Sikh Environment Day is an important way for adults to recognize how their actions impact children, and for children to develop a respectful relationship with the environment.

Children can accompany adults when purchasing plants for the sangat or community, be taught how to grow plants from seeds and cuttings, and help set up compost bins around the Gurdwara.

Gurdwaras can arrange speech/poetry competitions for children to speak about the environment. The ideas for these speeches are similar to those suggested for *katha* and should incorporate the perspective of children on why they feel the environment is an important issue.

Children can be encouraged to speak to their schools during assembly times or in lessons, to explain why we must all protect the vulnerable natural world.

### **4. Healthy Langar**

Eating fresh, healthy langar is an important part of taking care of our own health, land, and farmers. Gurdwaras can celebrate the day by using healthy or pesticide-free ingredients in their parshad and langar. The sangat can support this effort by: Growing methi (fenugreek), dhanian (cilantro or coriander), pudina (mint), lemons and chilies, to offer in the garden; Buying a couple of lbs/a kilo of organic or low-pesticide vegetables from

market to share for healthy food for langar; and Bringing spare Gurdwara land under organic agriculture.

Just as Mata Khivi Ji prepared *langar* with only the 'freshest ingredients' we can remind our sangat that eating langar made with the best ingredients is important for our health and the environment.

### **5. Plastic and Styrofoam-free**

Create a policy in your Gurdwara to avoid plastic and styrofoam plates, trays, or cutlery being used for langar.

Install information on the Gurdwara notice board and make a rule to eliminate the use of plastic cutlery in the langar hall. If your Gurdwara does use plastic regularly, you can create a plan to limit the use of plastics within three to six months by finding alternatives, such as steel or recycled materials.

### **6. Buta Parsad**

Have your Gurdwara coordinate a plant distribution, either of tree saplings, fruit saplings or flowering plants. Ensure that these plants are native to the surroundings and have a positive ecological impact:

**Possible Trees for Punjab** would be: Neem, Cedrela Toona, Terminalia Arjuna, Chakrasia, Tabularies Belerica, Bauhinia Variegata, Polyalthia Longifolia, Plumeria Alba, Chorisia Speciosa, Cassia Fistula, Jacaranda Acutifolia, Grevillea Robusta, Ficus Infectoria, Ficus Retusa, Ficus Benjamina, Cassia Nodosa, Peltophorum Ferrugineum, Bottle Brush, Toot, Talli, Jamun, Black Mulberry, Eugenia Jambolana.

**Possible Flowering Plants** would be: Salvia Splendense, Cineraria Cruentus; Antirrhinum Majus (Snap Dragon), Viola Tricolor (Pansy), Petunia Hybrida, Gazania Splendense, Calendula Officinalis, Tagetes Patula

You can also exchange plants with family and friends, or set up a garden in your Gurdwara to make your surroundings greener.

## 7. Tree Planting and Care

All Sikhs are encouraged to plant a tree on this day, out of respect for our Guru's concern for Creation. Gurdwaras can hold a tree planting and recite *ardas* after the planting to honor the environmental situation in the world, and in the Sikh spiritual homeland, Punjab. Gurdwaras can purchase saplings from a nearby nursery or if this is something they want to do regularly they can set up their own nurseries.

### How to Plant a Tree

- 1: About five days earlier: dig a pit of approximately 2'x2'x2' (60 cm x 60 cm x 60 cm).
2. At least a day earlier: collect 100g of mature neem seeds, wash and remove the husks, and allow drying completely. Grind into a fine powder. Stir into 2 litres of water and soak overnight. Stir again. If there are no neem seeds, then locate and source 2 litres of a natural, organic product for pest-management.
- 2: On the day: fill the pit with around 10kg of green/organic manure or compost. Drench the pit with the 2 litres of natural or neem-based product for pest management in the soil.

3: Plant the tree, without disturbing the roots up to its collar region.

4: Lightly water the tree immediately after planting

5: Support the tree with a wooden stick or similar to ensure it stays upright during initial growth.

6: Training and pruning tree: as the tree grows, the branches below 3ft (around 1 metre) should be trimmed to ensure the natural shape.

7: Install appropriate tree guards to prevent any damage or grazing by animals. A metal tree guard will cost approximately Rs. 150-300 per piece. Or you can make a wooden tree guard cheaply out of waste.

8: Protect against disease/pests whenever they appear with the neem-based compound or other natural organic pest control.

9: Weed and hoe: this should be done timely to ensure that no weeds grow by the tree and the soil near the tree remains aerated.

10: For the first two years fertilize the tree annually: 5 kg of green or organic manure is recommended annually for a normal tree for the initial two years of growth.

## 8. Organize a Cleanup

Wherever we live, whether a village, town or city, there is an area which can be much cleaner and liveable, and some neighbour-hoods have several. Your sangat can use this day to make your surroundings cleaner and healthier places to live. This [guide](#)<sup>2</sup> offers an idea of how to plan, organize and carry out

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<sup>2</sup> **How to Plan a Cleanup:**

[http://173.254.36.65/wpcontent/uploads/2011/10/Neighborhood\\_Cleanup.pdf](http://173.254.36.65/wpcontent/uploads/2011/10/Neighborhood_Cleanup.pdf)

a safe, effective and fun cleanup where you live, and how to get the resources to do it with your local sangat.

#### 9. Keep Records of What You Do and Share

Together we can make sure that the Gurgaddi Diwas of Guru Har Rai Ji's annual celebration remains with us for generations. Your sangat can contribute do this by making our own archive our work, sharing our successes with our surrounding community, taking photographs, informing your local media, putting it up on your website, your social media site, and offering to give talks to others in your community to make this even bigger next year.

Guru Sahib reminded Sikhs that the Truth transcends the all of Nature through the words, '*Balihari Kudrat Vasiya, Tera Ant Na Jai Lakhia.*' Through the inspiration of our Gurus we can work towards living in harmony with this Divine Gift.

Thank you for making the Sikh Environment Day 2013 the most memorable celebration yet. May the Khalsa remain spiritually exalted, and always in service of humanity.

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