BACKGROUNDERS
Press Information Bureau
Government of India

World Wildlife Day 2026

Medicinal and Aromatic Plants: Conserving Health, Heritage and Livelihoods

03 March, 2026

Key Takeaways

- World Wildlife Day (WWD) is observed on 3 March to mark the adoption of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora**)**.
- The theme for WWD 2026 is "Medicinal and Aromatic Plants: Conserving Health, Heritage and Livelihoods" highlighting the importance of plant resources for health and livelihoods.
- India is one of the 17 mega biodiversity-rich countries with around 15,000 medicinal plant species. 8,000 of these are used in Indian medicine, making it one of the world's most important hubs for medicinal and aromatic plants.
- India actively conserves medicinal and aromatic plants through in-situ and ex-situ efforts, with 9,361 Medicinal and Aromatic Plants accessions conserved by National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources, New Delhi.

Introduction

The world observes **World Wildlife Day on 3rd March every year**. Proclaimed by the United Nations to celebrate wild fauna and flora and to raise awareness about their importance to people and the planet. The day marks the adoption of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), reinforcing global commitment to ensuring that trade in wildlife does not threaten species survival. The day underscores that wildlife is not merely part of nature's beauty, but a critical pillar of food security, healthcare, livelihoods, climate resilience, and sustainable development. At a time when biodiversity faces mounting pressure from habitat destruction, over exploitation, illegal trade, and climate change, World Wildlife Day serves as a global call to conserve and sustainably use biological resources for present and future generations.

The theme for World Wildlife Day 2026 - **"Medicinal and Aromatic Plants: Conserving Health, Heritage and Livelihoods"**- highlights the importance of plants used for medicine, their role in preserving cultural traditions, and the income they provide to local communities. Across the world, 70–95% of people in developing countries depend on traditional medicine for basic healthcare, much of it derived from plant-based resources. Medicinal and aromatic plants form the foundation of traditional systems of medicine and also contribute significantly to modern pharmaceuticals. Beyond their health applications, these plants strengthen ecosystems by supporting pollinators, improving soil health, and enhancing biodiversity. Their conservation is therefore a global priority, especially for biodiversity-rich countries like India.

India's Rich Biodiversity of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants

For India, the 2026 theme carries a particular significance. India is one of the 17 mega biodiversity-rich countries in the world and has 7% of the world's bio-diversity. It has 15 agro-climatic regions,45,000 different plant species out of which 15,000 are medicinal plants. Of these, about 8,000 species are used in Indian systems of medicine and folk medicines. Nearly **70%** of India's medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs) are found in the tropical forests of the Western and Eastern Ghats, the Himalayas, and the Aravalli range.

National Arogya Fair 2026

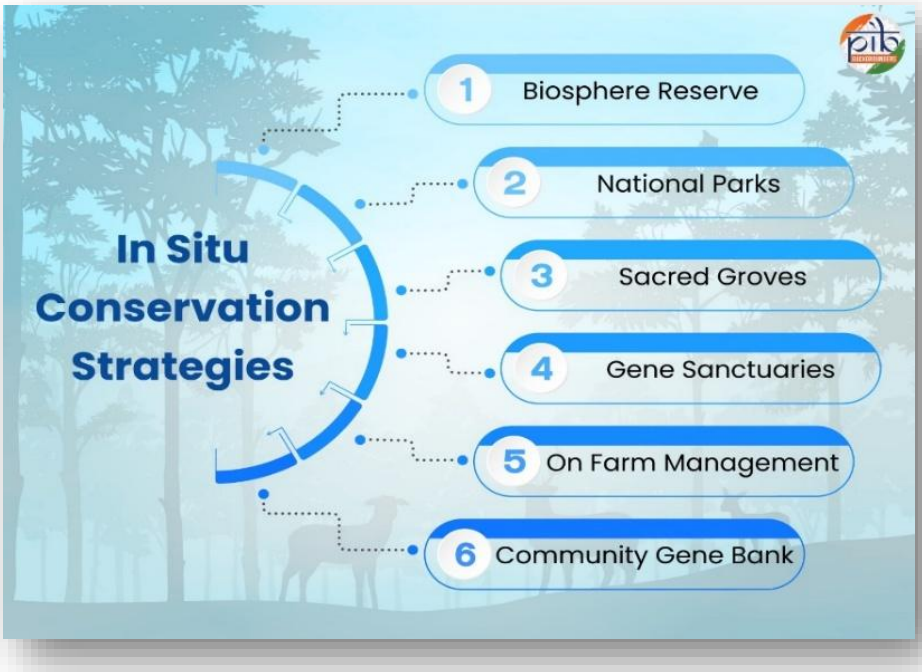
The Ministry of Ayush organised the National Arogya Fair 2026 at Shegaon, Maharashtra, from 25 to 28 February. A session on Ayurvedic Farming covered medicinal plant cultivation, agroforestry, and market linkages.

The Botanical Survey of India has identified over 5,250 plant species and documented over 9,567 folks claims for various ailments. India has been taking strong steps to protect this rich heritage. The **National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB)** runs a dedicated scheme for the conservation and sustainable management of medicinal plants. It supports farmer training, research, and marketing. These efforts reflect India's strong and unwavering commitment to protecting its rich medicinal plant heritage.

Conservation Mechanisms

India has adopted a strong and multi-layered approach to conserve its rich medicinal and aromatic plant heritage.

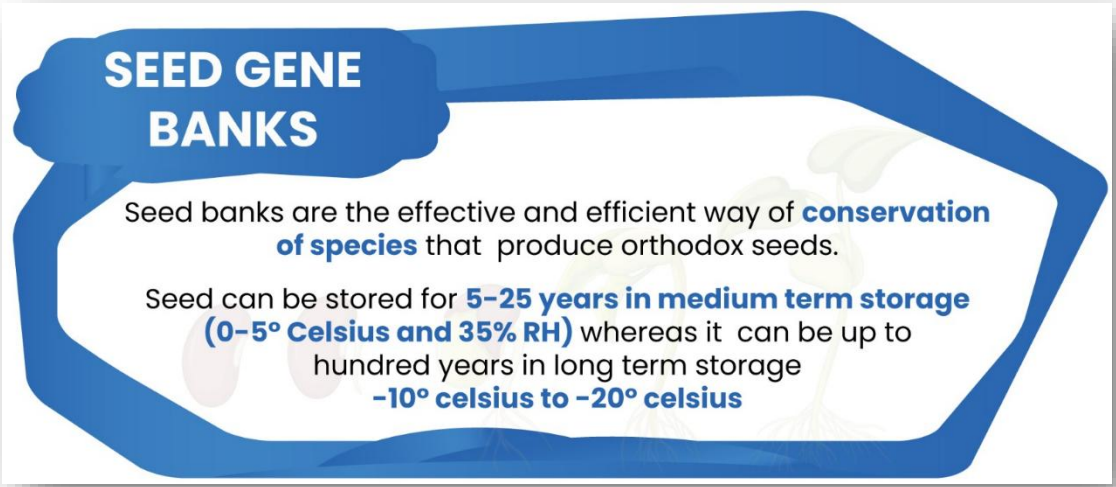
In-Situ Conservation



In situ conservation means protecting plants and animals in their natural habitats. It is carried out through national parks, biosphere reserves and gene sanctuaries. One important example of such conservation for medicinal plants is the Medicinal Plants Conservation Area initiative (MPCA). MPCA is a designated site aimed at protecting medicinal plant species in their natural habitats. Presently, 108 MPCA sites in India represent models to implement indigenous health traditions along with biological and cultural diversity using in-situ conservation techniques.

Ex-Situ Conservation

Ex situ conservation means protecting plant genetic resources outside their natural habitats under controlled conditions to ensure long-term preservation and possible reintroduction into the wild. In India, this includes the conservation of 9,361 medicinal and aromatic plant (MAP) accessions at the National Seed Gene Bank, National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR), New Delhi. These ex-situ methods are used for species with poor seed formation or vegetative propagation. Together, they help secure medicinal plant diversity for future use.



Key Government Schemes and Initiatives

The Government has launched several key schemes and initiatives to promote the conservation, cultivation, and sustainable use of medicinal plants across the country.

National Ayush Mission (NAM)

The National Ayush Mission (NAM) is a flagship scheme of the Ministry of AYUSH implemented through States and Union Territories. It promotes the cultivation of medicinal plants integrated with farming systems to support crop diversification and enhance farmer incomes. The Mission encourages cultivation

following **Good Agricultural and Collection Practices (GACP)** to improve quality and support value-added AYUSH products.

NAM also strengthens quality control of Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, and Homoeopathy (ASU & H) drugs, ensures sustainable availability of raw materials, and promotes public–private collaboration across research, processing and marketing to develop a robust medicinal plants sector.

Aushadhi Vanaspati Mitra Program (AVMP)

This program recognizes and rewards individuals, communities, and institutions for their outstanding contribution to medicinal plant conservation, cultivation, and marketing. It encourages more people to actively participate in protecting medicinal plants.

Central Sector Scheme for Conservation, Development and Sustainable Management of Medicinal Plants

This is a scheme run by the Government of India, through NMPB, for conservation of medicinal plants in their natural habitats by setting up Medicinal Plants Conservation and Development Areas (MPCDAs). The outlay for this scheme is ₹322.41 crores for 2021-22 to 2025-26 period. The conservation initiatives are also promoted by supporting plantations on degraded and rural lands. Research and quality assurance are key focus areas, supported through GACPs and Raw Drug Repositories across the country.

e-CHARAK and Minimum Support Price (MSP)

The e-CHARAK portal connects farmers to markets and provides price updates from 25 herbal markets across India. The MSP mechanism ensures farmers receive fair prices for their medicinal plant produce, encouraging sustainable cultivation and reducing pressure on wild sources.

Herbal Gardens and Awareness Programs

Herbal gardens are promoted in schools, institutions, and public spaces to build awareness among students and the general public. Species-specific multimedia campaigns are also run on radio, TV, and print media to highlight the importance of medicinal plants in daily life.

Eco Task Force for Habitat Rehabilitation

The Eco Task Force mechanism, involving ex-servicemen and Territorial Army personnel, is engaged to restore and rehabilitate critical medicinal plant habitats. Each Eco Task Force covers at least 400 hectares per year, with a minimum of 60% plantation of native medicinal plant species.

Livelihood Support to Local Communities

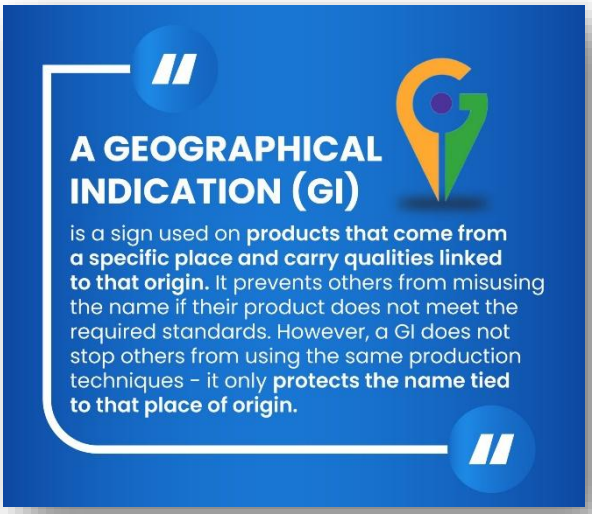
The scheme provides financial and infrastructural support to Joint Forest Management Committees, Self Help Groups, Van Panchayats, and Biodiversity Management Committees. This helps local communities with value addition, drying, warehousing, and marketing of medicinal plants, directly improving their livelihoods.

Bilateral and International Cooperation

NMPB actively collaborates with international agencies like Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Bank to mainstream medicinal plant conservation globally. It also participates in international exhibitions and works to protect India's

traditional knowledge and ensure fair benefit-sharing under global agreements.

Protecting India's Medicinal Plant Heritage Through GI Tags



- **Navara Rice (Oryza sativa L.)** is grown mainly in Palakkad and nearby districts of Kerala. It is called *Shashtikashali* in Ayurveda. It is an important part of the Panchakarma treatment known as Navarakizhi. It helps in treating rheumatic pain. It is useful for polio-related disabilities. It improves blood circulation problems. It also helps in respiratory diseases.
- **Green Cardamom (Elettaria cardamomum (L.) Maton)** has two GI varieties – Alleppey from Kerala and Coorg from Karnataka. In Ayurveda, it is known as *Sukshma-ela* or *Elaichi*. It is used to treat asthma, relieve cough, and difficulty in urination.
- **Ganjam Kewda Flower (Pandanus odorifer (Forssk.) Kuntze)** is GI tagged for Odisha, mainly from Ganjam district. It is known as *Ketakipushpa* in Ayurveda. It is used in the treatment of eye problems and respiratory disorders.
- **Saffron (Crocus sativus L.)** is GI tagged for Jammu and Kashmir. It is known as *Kumkuma* in Ayurveda. It is used to treat migraine, heal wounds, vomiting, and skin discoloration and patches.

Conclusion

India's journey in protecting its medicinal and aromatic plant heritage is a story of deep roots and forward vision. From the forests of the Western Ghats to the farms of Vidarbha, from ancient Ayurvedic wisdom to modern digital platforms like e-CHARAK, the country is weaving conservation, livelihood, and healthcare into a single strong thread. With committed institutions, empowered communities, and inclusive policies, India is not just preserving its green wealth, it is turning it into a source of health, pride, and prosperity for generations to come.

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