

Pune Inc: How an engineer's indoor plant business bloomed well

NurseryLive has tied up with 125 nurseries across India, of which over 70 are around Pune. After the disruption caused by Covid, the company is aggressively focusing on growth.

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(From left) Satender Kumar, Nidhi Singh, Nandu Singh

Nandu Singh, CEO of Pune-based gardening company NurseryLive, arrives for a meeting of startup founders, investors and other business minds called D2C Unlocked, dressed in a white shirt and jeans. “I have six whites in different shades, which make my life easy in the morning. I don’t have to spend time deciding what to wear,” he says.

Nandu was one of the panellists of D2C Unlocked, which was organised by Simpl, a platform for credit-based payments, in Pune on July 21. Over the last decade, he has shored up his credentials by turning a disruptive idea into a leading company, faced difficulties during Covid and is now focusing on growth.

“House plants are moving very fast now, from money plant to jade. People feel that an empty corner of a house can now be filled with plants. People are more aware of gardening trends. We have also seen a rise in demand for parijat after Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) planted a sapling of this flowering plant on the premises of the Ram temple in Ayodhya,” he says.

NurseryLive, founded in 2014 by Nandu, Nidhi Singh and Satender Kumar with an investment of Rs 25 lakh, has built a community of around 48 lakh users who read their newsletters, write to them and purchase from them. It is the community-based model that makes NurseryLive capable of swift turnarounds to bounce back higher.

A Pune boy who took the conventional route of studying engineering at the **Army Institute of Technology** and following it up with an MBA from Symbiosis before joining top tech companies, Nandu veered off the usual course and started a gardening company along with Nidhi, who is now his wife. At the time, people preferred buying plants from local shops and the idea of ordering it online was new.

In 2014, when the team was defining the platform, a little research showed him that the horticulture industry in Europe, Canada, Australia and other countries was flourishing.

“In India, it was at a primitive stage. E-commerce was also just picking up. Nobody was doing what we wanted to, so we had a first-mover advantage,” he says. Since then, the home gardening sector has grown. After Covid, people have become interested in greening their balconies and homes. Air-purifying plants have become popular and clients, especially millennials, are indulging themselves by growing vegetables and flowers.

NurseryLive works through agreements with nurseries and distributes plants to cities across India. They have tied up with 125 nurseries across India, of which over 70 are located around Pune. “Every morning, we have a vehicle loaded with plants that will be sent to Bengaluru, [Mumbai](#), Agra, Ambala and Puducherry, among others,” he explains. Among the buyers is a woman who bought 40 plants in two years, and a man who always orders flowering plants, usually roses or hibiscus, but always of a different variety, Nandu says.

The company’s warehouses stretch 60,000 sqft, but plants make up only a third of the inventory. The majority of plants are kept at extended nurseries with farmers. Most of the space is for non-perishables, such as cocopeat, soil, fertilisers and equipment.

“People know more about gardening now. The pattern of online shopping, too, has become stronger since Covid. Earlier, there was a certain category who wanted to visit our centre or opt for cash-on-delivery because they did not have faith in e-commerce. Now, people know that things, including plants, can be shipped to their homes. We feel that this is the right time for us to expand again,” says Nandu.

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