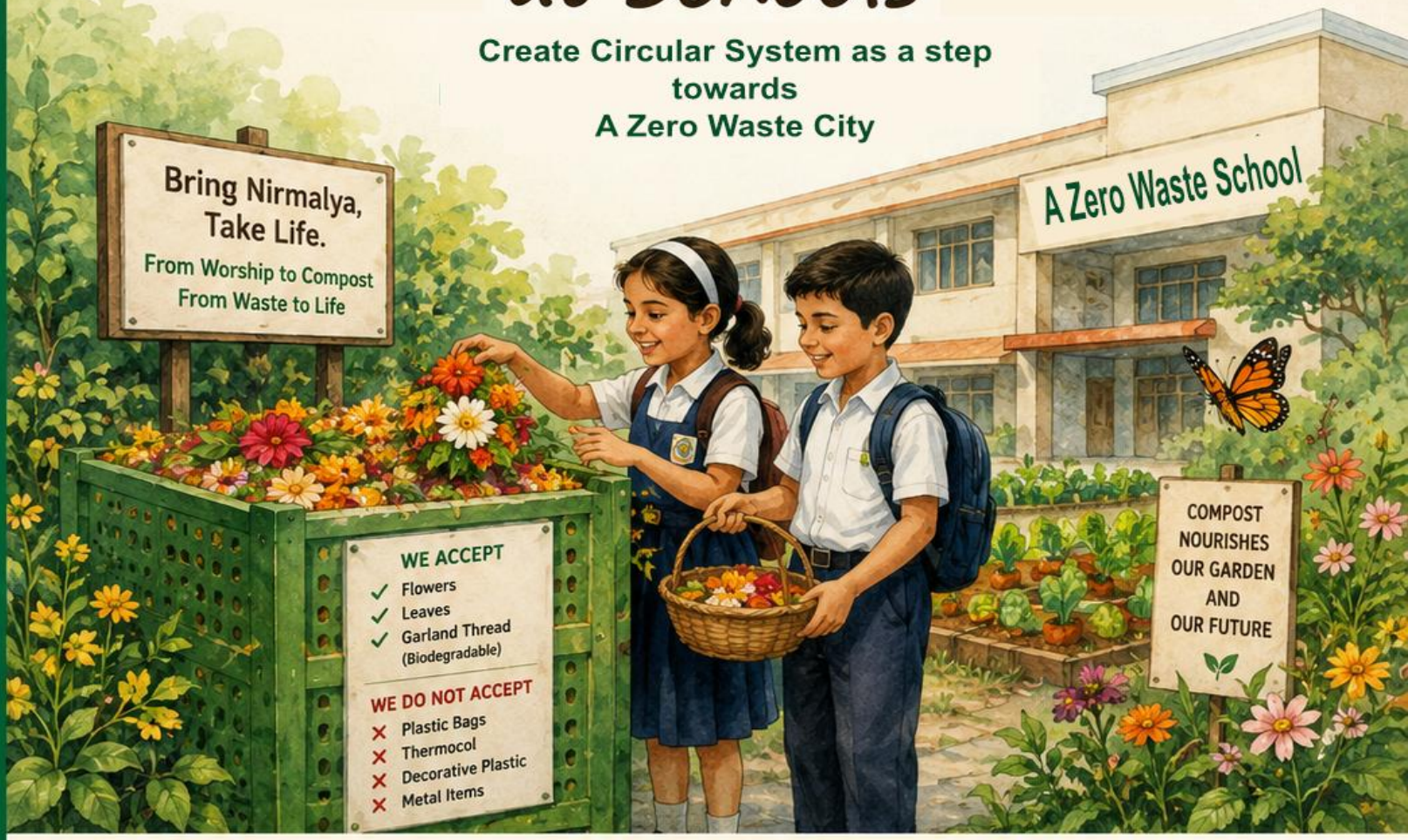
MISSION
CITY CHAKRA

SCHOOL SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT LIBRARY

NIRMALYA COMPOSTING

at Schools

Create Circular System as a step towards A Zero Waste City



REDUCE POLLUTION | CREATE COMPOST | NOURISH GARDENS | SUPPORT BIODIVERSITY | ENGAGE COMMUNITY | ENRICH LEARNING

"When schools become neighbourhood sustainability centres, waste becomes a resource and every child becomes a changemaker."

Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics
(Deemed to be University)

Centre for Sustainable Development

MISSION CITY CHAKRA

School *Nirmalya* Project Toolkit

Planning Template by Mission City Chakra

Contents

NIRMALYA COMPOSTING AT SCHOOLS

A practical roadmap for schools to become neighbourhood sustainability centres

Nirmalya from homes and neighbourhoods can become a valuable resource for the school garden instead of being disposed of in water bodies.

By creating a simple composting system, schools can reduce pollution, enrich their soil, engage families and give students a first-hand experience of nature's circular systems.

SCHOOLS AS COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY CENTRES

Schools influence far more people than the students within their classrooms. Every school is connected to hundreds of families and often to the neighbourhood around it.

This gives schools a unique opportunity: **they can become centres of sustainability for their communities.**

A Nirmalya composting project is one such opportunity. Although nirmalya is generated primarily at homes and places of worship, a school can provide the space, systems and inspiration to ensure that it returns safely to the soil.

The project can help schools:

- divert biodegradable material from water bodies and disposal systems
- create compost for gardens
- involve parents and neighbourhood residents
- create opportunities for hands-on learning
- support biodiversity through gardens
- demonstrate circularity in action

The school becomes more than an educational institution. **It becomes a community sustainability centre.**

WHAT IS NIRMALYA?

Nirmalya comprises flowers, leaves, fruits, rice and other biodegradable materials offered during religious practices.

For many families, nirmalya is considered sacred rather than ordinary waste. Traditionally, immersion in a river or other water body was one way of returning these offerings to nature.

Today, however, urban water bodies face many pressures, including reduced freshwater flows, untreated sewage and increasing pollution loads. Returning large quantities of organic material to already stressed water bodies can add to this pressure.

This gives us an opportunity to rethink an old practice without losing its underlying intention:

How can we return nirmalya to nature in a way that works for today's cities?

WHAT IS THE WAY OUT?

Follow the Soil-to-Soil Principle

Nature does not create waste. Materials continuously move through cycles: the output of one process becomes the input for another.

Everything comes from the soil, and much of what grows from it can eventually return to the soil.

Why not let nirmalya complete the same cycle?

Through composting, flowers and other biodegradable offerings can return to the soil as organic matter. The compost can nourish gardens, support plants and create new life—while reducing the pressure on urban water bodies.

Nirmalya composting does not solve all the problems our rivers face. Issues such as untreated sewage require large-scale systemic action.

But schools do not have to wait for every problem to be solved before acting on what is within their control.

They can start at a scale that is feasible, visible and meaningful.

That is what several schools in Pune have demonstrated.

CASE STUDIES

Huzurpaga English Medium School, Mangdewadi, Katraj

A neighbourhood collection model

Principal Mrs. Kirti Pandit saw an opportunity where others saw a challenge. With few large trees on campus, the school did not have enough dry leaves for traditional composting.

Instead, it began collecting nirmalya from students, parents and nearby residents. A porous composting unit near the entrance makes participation easy.

The compost nourishes the school's kitchen garden, while marigold plants and butterflies have naturally appeared—turning the project into a living demonstration of nature's cycles.

Read More: https://missioncitychakra.com/pune-sustainability-map/sustainability-school-champions/huzurpaga-katraj-nirmalya-composting-school/

Ahilya Devi School, Shaniwar Peth, Pune

A school serving 2,000 households

A garden created on the school premises uses nirmalya collected from around 2,000 households.

Students bring nirmalya to school in bags, eliminating the need for separate transportation. The material is returned directly to the soil, nourishing the garden and reducing the amount entering the river system.

The visible result—a flourishing garden—helps students and families experience the value of the project directly.

Read More: https://brownleaf.org/school-in-pune-has-terrace-garden-blossoming-on-nirmalya-from-2000-households/

Renuka Swarup School, Sadashiv Peth, Pune

A student-led community model

During the peak festive season, students collect nirmalya from nearby Ganesh pandals and encourage organisers to contribute it to the school's composting project.

The nirmalya is deposited in composting pits on the school premises. Students manage the project, and the finished compost is harvested, packed and sold.

The initiative gives students an opportunity to engage with the community, take ownership of a real project, understand its economic aspects and contribute to solving a city-wide challenge.

HOW CAN YOUR SCHOOL START?

A Nirmalya Composting project can begin with a simple system.

1. Identify a suitable location

Choose a convenient location, preferably near the school entrance, where parents can easily deposit nirmalya.

2. Set up a composting unit

Install a simple porous or aerobic composting unit appropriate to the school's available space.

3. Make the instructions clear

Display a simple sign showing what can and cannot be deposited.

4. Make participation easy for parents

Invite parents to bring nirmalya when dropping off their children or send it with their children.

5. Invite the neighbourhood

Once the system is established, nearby residents can also be invited to participate.

6. Assign ownership

An Eco Club, teacher or designated staff coordinator can oversee the project and ensure continuity.

7. Close the loop

Use the finished compost in the school garden, vegetable patch or butterfly garden. Parents can also be invited to take compost home for their own gardens.

> ***The key is not to create a complicated waste-management system. It is to create an easy, visible and locally circular alternative.***

TURNING THE PROJECT INTO A LIVING CLASSROOM

Nirmalya composting can become much more than a waste-management activity.

Students can observe and learn about:

- Decomposition and microorganisms
- Soil and plant health
- Ecology and biodiversity
- Nutrient cycles
- Circular economy
- Climate and environmental systems
- River conservation

The composting unit, garden and resulting biodiversity together become a living laboratory for systems thinking and experiential learning.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

A successful sustainability project is not only about creating awareness. It is about designing a system that makes the desired action simple.

Make the sustainable choice the easy choice.

Place the collection point where people naturally pass.

Offer an alternative, not just awareness.

Don't only tell people not to immerse nirmalya in water. Give them a convenient alternative: **bring it to school.**

Create visible outcomes.

Flowers, vegetables, butterflies and healthy soil make the impact tangible.

Close the loop locally.

Return the compost to the school garden so that students can see the complete cycle from offering to soil to new life.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

The project can be started with relatively simple resources:

- A suitable composting unit
- A clearly marked collection point
- A simple instruction signboard
- One staff coordinator
- An Eco Club or student team
- A garden, vegetable patch or landscaped area where compost can be used

BENEFITS

🌱 Environmental

Reduces the amount of biodegradable material entering water bodies or disposal systems, improves soil health and supports biodiversity.

📚 Educational

Creates a living classroom where students can experience decomposition, nutrient cycles, circularity and ecological systems.

🤝 Community

Creates an opportunity for parents and neighbourhood residents to participate in a practical sustainability initiative.

🏫 Institutional

Demonstrates how a school can use its influence and infrastructure to address an environmental challenge beyond its own campus.

WHERE CAN YOUR SCHOOL GO NEXT?

Nirmalya composting can be the beginning of a larger school sustainability journey.

Within the school

- Dry leaf composting
- Butterfly gardens

- Kitchen gardens
- Rainwater harvesting
- Waste audits

Reducing waste at source

- Steel tiffins
- Steel water bottles
- Non-plastic textbook covers
- Plastic-free school practices

Extending the school's influence

- Community e-waste drives
- Freecycle events
- Plastic collection campaigns
- Cloth and resource-sharing initiatives

Start with one project. Learn from it. Build the next.

ONE SCHOOL CAN INSPIRE MANY

Every city has hundreds of schools connected to thousands of families.

When a school becomes a neighbourhood sustainability centre, its influence extends far beyond its campus.

A collection point can reach homes.
A composting unit can nourish a garden.
A garden can attract biodiversity.
A project can become a lesson.
A lesson can influence a family.
And families can influence a neighbourhood.

This is how small institutional actions can contribute to city-scale change.

IMPLEMENTATION LEARNING

People are more likely to change when a meaningful and convenient alternative is available.

Instead of simply saying:

"Don't throw nirmalya into the river."

Give them a better action:

"Bring it here. We'll transform it into life."

The role of the school is not to police behaviour. It is to **create a better system, make participation easy, demonstrate the result and invite the community to become part of it.**

That is how a school can become a **centre of change for its neighbourhood.**

MISSION CITY CHAKRA IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT

Ready to start?

Mission City Chakra provides schools with communication material, posters, presentations and implementation guidance to help set up a Nirmalya Composting project.

Resources

- Parent communication template
- Collection-point poster
- What to bring / what not to bring poster
- Student presentation
- Composting setup guide
- Case studies from Pune schools

https://missioncitychakra.com/nirmalya-composting-at-schools/

ABOUT MISSION CITY CHAKRA

Designing Cities as Circular Systems

Mission City Chakra (MCC) is an initiative of the Centre for Sustainable Development, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, working towards a **Zero-Waste Pune by design**.

Inspired by nature, where resources continuously move through circular systems and nothing becomes waste, MCC focuses on **reducing waste at source** through better material choices, circular practices and institutional policies.

Our approach is to work with **Intermediate Policymakers**—people who influence the everyday choices of hundreds or thousands of people. These include school principals, office administrators, elected representatives, housing society leaders and other institutional decision-makers.

MCC develops and documents practical solutions, creates implementation resources and supports institutions in adopting waste-reduction practices at scale.

Schools as Centres of Change

We believe schools can play a role far beyond managing the waste generated on their own premises.

A school can influence students, families and its neighbourhood. It can introduce healthier and more sustainable policies, create circular systems within the campus and become a **community sustainability centre**.

This handbook is part of the **Mission City Chakra School Sustainability Project Library—** a collection of practical ideas, case studies and implementation resources that schools can use to begin their own journey towards zero waste.

Explore More

Visit Mission City Chakra: www.missioncitychakra.com

Explore:

- Zero Waste Solutions for Schools
- Pune Sustainability Map
- Stories and Case Studies
- School Sustainability Project Library
- Implementation Resources
- Roadmaps for Institutions

Towards a Zero-Waste Pune
Documenting the people, institutions and ideas that are moving the city towards circularity.

This resource is part of the Mission City Chakra School Sustainability Project Library. For updated resources, implementation support and Pune-based contacts, visit missioncitychakra.com