



Dr. Janaki Ammal spent years creating new plants called hybrids. These combinations of different plant varieties can be difficult to make, but she enjoyed working in the laboratory. She even had a squirrel that kept her company.

Dr. Janaki faced a big challenge: creating a new sugarcane hybrid that would grow well in India. She tried many times before a hybrid was successful. The new, sweeter, hybrid sugarcane she created is still enjoyed across the country today.



Dr. Janaki Ammal
(JAH-nah-KEE ah-MALL)
India, 1897–1984



Later, Dr. Janaki led the Botanical Survey of India. The project worked to document and study every type of plant in the country. It was a big job: India is over a million square miles (that's almost three million square kilometers). She scoured the country for plants. She also fought to protect plants and preserve natural areas from development.



Why is it important to protect plants?



Plants are important for the health of Earth's environment. They provide a home for animals, fungi, insects, and many of the living things that support our planet's delicate ecosystems. When one part of the environment suffers, other parts suffer too.

Dr. Wangari Maathai saw what happened when too many trees were cut down in the rainforest. The soil dried up and people couldn't grow enough food. Animals lost their shelters and sources of food. Stream water evaporated in the hot sun.



Dr. Wangari started the Green Belt Movement to change things. She taught women in Kenya how to grow trees from seeds, and the women were paid to plant trees all around the country.

As the trees grew, the soil healed, and food could be grown again. Animals returned to safety, and tree shade let streams flow once more. Dr. Wangari also led classes to strengthen and protect the small communities that relied on the trees.



Not everyone wanted Dr. Wangari to speak out for the environment or fight for human rights. She was even arrested, but she kept planting trees. Dr. Wangari's world-changing work earned her a special award called a Nobel Peace Prize. Today, the Green Belt Movement she began has planted over 50 million trees and improved the lives of many people.

Dr. Wangari Maathai
(wahn-GAH-ree mah-THAIY)
Kenya, 1940–2011





Plants give us so much!

Yes. Plants are powerful. They make life on Earth possible. They nourish our communities, improve our health, shelter and feed animals, heal and protect the environment, and make the world more beautiful.

Give plants space to grow, and incredible things can happen. All it takes is a handful of seeds.

