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Vertical gardens' benefits go beyond dollars and cents



The Ocean Financial Centre (above) last held the record for being the world's largest vertical garden before The Tree House (top right) clinched it. The vertical garden at Parkroyal on Pickering is one of the 154 such projects in Singapore. Mr Bernard Lee with his wife Karen Soh, 35, and children Cherelle (left), seven, and Caeven, four, at their Tree House condo. ST PHOTO: CHEW SENG KIM PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI FOR THE STRAITS TIMES ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

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THOSE who live or work in buildings with vertical gardens enjoy being closer to greenery, birds and butterflies, and feel inspired to lead more environmentally friendly lives, they say.

Earlier this month, City Developments (CDL), the developer of the Tree House condominium in Bukit Timah, announced that its 24-storey vertical garden had clinched a Guinness World Record for being the world's largest.

It is one of 154 vertical garden projects in Singapore, the Building and Construction Authority (BCA) said in response to queries.

Others include vertical gardens in hotel Parkroyal on Pickering and the Ocean Financial Centre, which last held the record of being the world's largest vertical garden.

Vertical gardens are often highlighted for helping save costs by cooling surface temperatures and reducing the need for air-conditioning; but those who live or work in such buildings are quick to point out that the benefits go beyond dollars and cents.

Tree House resident Bernard Lee, 35, for one, pointed out how the garden attracts wildlife, such as birds, butterflies and snails.

Said the civil servant: "We see them on our evening strolls around the estate and these strolls serve as science lessons for our two young kids, aged seven and four."

For Ms Mariquel Pacheco, operations manager at Parkroyal on Pickering, working in the green building has inspired her to lead a more environmentally friendly lifestyle.

Said the 28-year-old: "In such a green environment, I find myself making a conscious effort to conserve energy, use less water and recycle paper and newspapers."

A National Parks Board (NParks) spokesman said such gardens can reduce "the urban heat island effects" by cooling surface temperatures by up to 12 deg C - something that Mr Lee can attest to.

"There is no need for air-conditioning during the year-end period. In fact, we had to shut our windows in December last year," he said.

Mr Tan Swee Yiow, president of Singapore operations at Keppel Land, which developed the Ocean Financial Centre, noted that tenants felt that green buildings enhance the overall well-being of employees as they benefit from features such as better air quality.

"The urban plaza at Ocean Financial Centre, where the green wall and art pieces are located, has also become a common meeting place for many in Raffles Place," he added.

There is no specific requirements for a building before a vertical garden can be built, NParks said, although approval is needed from the relevant authorities.

The Government is also encouraging more developers to green their buildings under the enhanced Landscaping for Urban Spaces and High-Rises (Lush) programme, where developers enjoy perks if they install more skyrise greenery in their buildings.

For instance, those who convert rooftops into gardens at buildings in the Orchard and Downtown Core areas can get bonus gross floor area for an outdoor dining space.

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