

Paddy to petals: Sangrur farmer finds prosperity in marigold, has eyes set on roses

Courtesy: Anju Agnihotri Chhaba



In Punjab's Pedni Kalan village in Dhuri tehsil of Sangrur district, 41-year-old Sukhdeep Singh has carved out a vibrant niche, not with MSP-backed wheat or paddy, but with marigolds. Over the past decade, he has transformed his eight-acre farm into a floriculture hub, dedicating four acres to marigold cultivation across multiple seasons and varieties, while the remaining four acres are used for wheat and paddy during the rabi and kharif seasons, respectively. With plans to diversify into rose cultivation, Sukhdeep represents a quiet yet determined shift in Punjab's farming narrative. Sukhdeep, who holds a 10+2 qualification and an ITI diploma, began experimenting with flower cultivation on just half a bigha (2.5 kanals) in 2012, inspired by relatives already involved in the flower trade. With little experience and limited market knowledge, he initially struggled, unable even to sell his first batch of flowers. However, the encouraging yield motivated him to learn more about both cultivation techniques and market dynamics. "We started with a small area, and after gaining market knowledge, we received a good response. Our relatives not only inspired us but also helped us with cultivation and in finding markets for our flowers," he said. "Now, we cultivate various varieties of marigolds in different shades of yellow, from light yellow to saffron and mustard, throughout the year with proper planning and crop rotation." Sukhdeep grows seven-eight varieties of marigolds, both summer and winter types such as Jafari (African marigold), sown in winter, and Laddu Gaiinda, known for its large, round blooms grown in summer. He employs seed

sowing, grafting and nursery techniques at different times of the year. For instance, during January and February, he sows seeds that flower in March and April. In March, he uses grafting techniques, resulting in blooms from May to June, which continue until August. From August to December, he plants nursery-grown saplings. In favourable weather, a single marigold plant can bloom eight to ten times. His marigold calendar is finely tuned: summer varieties — around four types — are sown between January and April and begin flowering within 2 to 2.5 months of sowing, producing blooms continuously for nearly three months. Jafari varieties are primarily cultivated for the winter season. Four different types are grown between August and February. One early variety is sown in August and starts flowering from October, aligning with festive season demand during Dussehra, Diwali, and Guru Purab (birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev, the first Sikh Master and founder of Sikhism). A second variety, sown in October-November, is ideal for Lohri and the New Year. The third and fourth varieties, sown in November–December, bloom from January to April, catering to wedding season demand. Though the marigold cycle can span nearly five and a half months, I usually restrict each cycle to around four to four and a half months. This is because the yield drops towards the end of the season, so I uproot the crop early and replant new varieties. This allows me to grow flowers at least three times on the same field in a year, using different varieties in different plots based on market demand,” Sukhdeep said. “I also use one acre out of the four for growing a flower nursery between July and March. The nursery is ready in just 25 days, and I raise it 7-8 times during this period to sell saplings. From January to March, I grow nursery plants for summer marigolds two to three times, and then the same field is used again for flower cultivation from April to August. So, growing flowers is a year-round task,” he added. “For some varieties, we procure seeds from Kolkata,” he added. He says he rotates the fields for flower sowing and does not use the same plots repeatedly. Sukhdeep sells his marigolds daily to local traders and decoration shops in Sangrur, Barnala and Ludhiana, sending the flowers on buses. Despite fluctuating prices — ranging from Rs 70 – Rs 80 to Rs 200 per kg — he manages to maintain a steady profit. “There are a few off-season phases during the year when rates can drop to Rs 5–Rs 10 per kg, but regular sowing, high prices during festivals, and yields of 60-65 quintals per acre help ensure consistent returns,” he said, adding that on average, he earns Rs40–Rs50 per kg over the year. The total expenditure per acre is around Rs 15,000 to Rs 20,000 if the nursery is self-raised. However, if seeds are purchased from outside, the cost rises to Rs 25,000 to Rs 30,000 per acre. Labour adds

another Rs 10,000 per acre, making the overall cost roughly Rs 30,000 to Rs 50,000 per acre. Sukhdeep, along with his father and other family members, is fully involved in the day-to-day operations and providing permanent employment to three women of his village. “On average, we earn Rs 1.5 lakh to Rs 2 lakh per acre after expenses. If cultivated three times a year, the annual income from one acre is around Rs 4.5 lakh to Rs 6 lakh,” he said. “Our income from nursery sales alone is about Rs 60,000-Rs70,000 per cycle after expenses, and with multiple sowings throughout the year, I can easily earn Rs 3.5 lakh to Rs 4.00 lakh annually from just one acre.” He pointed out that the income from one acre of marigold cultivation is four to five times higher than the combined returns from wheat and paddy. Sukhdeep sells nursery plants through ‘Nirman Flowers’, a well-known name in Punjab’s floriculture sector. Floriculture also proves to be far more water-efficient compared to traditional crops. “The water required for one acre of paddy is equivalent to what we need for 10 acres of marigold,” Sukhdeep points out. This makes flower farming a sustainable option amid growing concerns over groundwater depletion in Punjab. Sukhdeep credits the state’s horticulture department for supporting his venture. “We received a 40 per cent subsidy on machinery like a rotavator and spray pump. Such schemes are encouraging,” he says. With a firm grip on marigold cultivation and nursery management, Sukhdeep is now preparing to expand into rose farming. “I’ve learnt the sowing techniques for roses and will soon diversify. The market is strong, and demand continues to grow,” he adds.
