

## Plastic ban: Lotus, banana leaves find more takers

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**Madurai:** The demand for banana leaves has gone up post plastic ban, as it has become one of the important food packaging materials as it was sold at ₹1,200 for a bundle in the Madurai Central market on Wednesday. Traders expect that the price will go beyond ₹2,000 next week.

On Wednesday, a bundle (Adukkku) of five banana leaves was sold between ₹25 to ₹50 at the retail market and farmers' markets. The bigger leaves, which can be cut into three pieces of about five feet in length, were sold at ₹10 each. Prabu, who owns a wholesale shop in Melur, says that his business is doing very well after the government enforced the plastic ban. "My shop usually gets about 400 bundles (Kattus) of smaller adukkus, but on Wednesday we received only 200 bundles, and we had to increase the price from ₹200 last week to ₹500 for quality leaves," he said. A bigger bundle consists of 40 smaller bundles of five leaves each.

"Meat stall owners are approaching us for the damaged leaves, which usually we throw away, and even those leaves are selling for Rs2, which is preventing wastage in our business," said Selvam another trader.

Banana plants start yielding in three to five months, and farmers leave the mother plant untouched and remove baby plants that sprout around it till about five months. "We start harvesting leaves from five months on-



Price of banana leaves doubles as it has become most sought after food packaging material

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wards till eight months, as banana plant has a life of about one year," said M Karuppanan, a farmer from Idayamelur in Sivaganga district.

Winter is not the best season for banana crop, as leaves do not unfurl uniformly and hence they must be harvested with care. Shanmugam, a wholesale dealer at the Malampatti banana market in Sivaganga, says that labour charge is ₹80 for cutting 200 leaves. Skilled labourers, who can cut the leaves with minimal damage, demand higher wages. "But, now as it is sugarcane harvest season, they get up to ₹1,300 a day in cane fields. So finding labour is also a problem for harvesting banana leaves," he said.

Farmers in Melur region also had a good harvest and they said the price may go beyond ₹2,000 next week.