

Qazvin's traditional gardens in danger of extinction



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The traditional gardens of Qazvin have surrounded the city from the east to the south, and have stretched across its western parts. Pistachios, almonds and other horticultural and agricultural crops are cultivated there. These gardens have saved the city from floods and environmental incidents for thousands of years. Nonetheless, they are in danger of extinction. According to historical documents, Iran boasted of traditional gardens of Qazvin until the pre-Pahlavi era (the Pahlavi Dynasty ruled from 1925 to 1979 CE).

It has been mentioned in the travelogue of Nasser al-Din Shah Qajar (the fourth monarch of the Qajar Dynasty, who ruled Iran from 1848 to 1896) that when he traveled to London to see the development of the British capital, officials showed him a big park. But the Qajar monarch proudly raised his head and highlighted the grandeur and beauty of Qazvin's gardens. Qazvin's traditional gardens covered an area of more than four thousand hectares until 50 years ago. But presently, 2,200 hectares of the gardens have remained. This national heritage, which lasted thousands of years, has been facing destruction for

a decade. This is because of construction under the pretext of urban development, along with drought and water scarcity. The traditional gardens of Qazvin were registered on the country's National Heritage List nearly a decade ago. The traditional gardens of Qazvin have played an effective role in regulating the climate of this city and stabilizing its soil. The mass of trees in this area also play a key role in reducing the temperature and controlling pollutants in the industrial towns around Qazvin.

Advantages of Qazvin's gardens

An environmental activist has touched upon the unique features of Qazvin's traditional gardens.

"The traditional gardens of Qazvin are like the lungs of the city. Undoubtedly, Qazvin would have to grapple with many environmental problems including air pollution, if it did not have these gardens," Motahareh Haji Qassemi told ISNA.

She added that the gardens need a low amount of water, and for a very long time they have been irrigated just twice a year. Haji Qassemi said the fruits and other horticultural products of these gardens possess a high quality, which are not compa-

rable with similar products in other gardens.

She said these gardens enjoy fertile soil and do not need chemical fertilizers.

The environmental activist said urban development, economic and security issues, as well as the division of lands among the heirs have put the gardens in danger of destruction.

Asgar Babook, a gardener, told ISNA that problems facing Qazvin's traditional gardens can be tackled through proper management and planning. He added that water and security are the main priorities of gardeners in the city. He also said that the soil of Qazvin gardens can be fed by running water and flood waters without using the underground water sources such as wells and qanats (an underground channel for directing irrigation water).

Municipality helps gardeners

Some environmental activists have blamed the municipality for the destruction of Qazvin's traditional gardens. However, the mayor of the city said the municipality seeks to save the gardens. He said the municipality has made efforts to resolve water scarcity by providing water tankers. The mayor urged the gardeners to switch

to modern irrigation systems to tackle water shortages and boost the productivity of their products.

The head of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Department of Qazvin says all state bodies should help protect the gardens. Alireza Khazaeli said the gardens have been registered on the National Heritage List, with the aim of preserving them for future generations. He added that tough regulations are in place for protecting the gardens. The official urged the media and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to play an effective role in informing the society about the significance of the gardens.

No specific guardian

A senior official of Qazvin's Justice Department also attached significance to preserving the city's traditional gardens.

Ali Foolian said the gardens are among Qazvin's most important heritage. He said the gardens not only provide food security for residents of the city, but some religious rituals are also held there.

He, however, complained that the gardens have no specific guardian. The official said the Justice Department has done its utmost to prevent encroachment on the gardens.

The old blackberry tree in Taft

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Several old trees aged between 400 years and 3,800 years have so far been identified in various provinces of Iran. The trees are not only among the most important genetic resources, but also considered a treasure for those who are involved in restoring renewable natural resources of the country.

Mirhashem is the name of an old blackberry tree in a village with the same name. One of the oldest in Taft, the central province of Yazd, it has grown far from agricultural fields of the region on the slopes of Zardin Mountain. A large number of people

visit this region every summer to pick very delicious blackberries grown on its branches, chn. ir wrote.

The locals believe that the tree is more than 700 years old, but considering the diameter of its trunk and the average growth rate of similar trees in the region, the age of the tree has been estimated at between 350 and 400 years.

The old tree of Yazd Province is one of the most important natural attractions of the desert area, which can draw many visitors to the region and improve the ecotourism sector of the province. Mirhashem village is located in a mountainous region of Taft. Due

to its higher elevation compared to other surrounding areas, the village, with desirable precipitation level and access to water resources, has a diverse vegetation cover.

Grown in a land with a very gentle slope, fertile soil, and a variety of vegetation, this tree can be seen from a long distance.

The old blackberry tree is located in a plain leading to inaccessible heights in a bed of bushy plants. As far as the eye can see, there is only this tree!

Registered on Iran's National Heritage List, the tree is very popular among the locals and its offshoots have become big and fruitful trees in many homes.



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