

# Intrinsic part of ethos of city

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WHAT'S UNIQUE ABOUT MM	
FRAGRANCE	The fragrance of the Madurai Malligai has been known to last for 36 hours. The laterite and reddish soils, a distinctive feature of the Madurai district, are rich in sulphur, which is the secret behind the fragrance-causing alkaloids in jasmine - jasmone and alpha terpinol.
PETALS	Compared to other varieties of jasmine grown in various parts of the country, the Madurai Malligai has thicker petals that allow the flowers to retain moisture and delay the process of withering. They also give the flowers some firmness and this makes it easier to weave them into various patterns and garlands.
COLOUR	The Madurai Malligai is greenish white when it is picked from the plant, early in the morning. After a few hours, it turns milky-white, and then, it turns pure white during the evening.

‘Madurai Malli’ is a flower for all seasons and reasons.

“Madurai malligai is not just a flower. It is an intrinsic part of the ethos of the city. And it is interwoven with the essence of Madurai’s rich culture and history, as well as the texture of the everyday lives of its people, their moods and their emotions...,” writes Uma Kannan in *Madurai Malligai*, a book celebrating Madurai and its jasmine, published in November 2012 by the Publication Division of Thiagarajar College.

The book captures the fragrance of this unique variety in its entirety in its effort to introduce ‘Madurai Malli’ to people all over the globe. It is also a tribute to the jasmine variety and the people who earn a living selling it.

The word jasmine, Dr. Uma points out, does not refer to a single plant or flower.

There are many varieties of jasmine found around the world and some of them are shrubs, creepers or climbers. And all of them belong to the olive family of genus *Jasminum*.

She refers to Madurai as the 'jasmine capital of India,' from where 'Madurai Malli' travels to other parts of the country and overseas.

The GI tag has come as a feather in the cap for the growers of 'Madurai Malli,' though they have no say in fixing its price in the market. "The flower sellers have no role in fixing the price because the flower market is a buyer's market and not a farmers' market." Life is also not a "bed of jasmine" for the retail sellers whose are ubiquitous in the city, especially around the Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple. For these sellers, stringing 'Madurai Malli' is like meditation. She expresses concern in the book over the use of materials such as coloured cotton thread or wool, in the place of the traditional banana fibre, for stringing 'Madurai Malli.'

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