

Permaculture is a gentle way to persuade the land where we live to provide healthy food, fodder, building materials, herbs, medicinal plants and other resources for now and for the future. The principles and techniques of permaculture are used to design sustainable systems of food production that work with nature for maximum long-term efficiency.



The word permaculture comes from PERMANent and AGRI-culture. Two Australian men - Bill Mollison and David Holmgren - invented the term in the 1970's. Integrating lessons from ecology, organic gardening, energy-efficient building and agro-forestry, permaculture principles help people to design rich and sustainable ways of living. What we might usually think of as waste put back into the system, recycling precious resources. Landscapes are designed to conserve water, energy and soil nutrients. The permaculture gardener saves time and energy by getting plants and animals do lots of the work - naturally.

Good things about permaculture food gardens

- Because of the efficient design, you don't need much land
- You create employment and a place to chat with friends and family
- You can feed your family with healthy nutritious food that tastes better than vegetables bought in the shop!
- You can sell excess fruit and veg to friends or the local store or swap with friends
- You can learn more and teach others how to work with soil and plants, producing healthy seeds from plants and keeping soil alive, so you get a good harvest of vegetables year after year

What might permaculture food garden look like?

Because it's all about working with nature, the design depends closely on the landscape and environment where you live. These are just a few of the principles and techniques that the permaculture gardener uses to conserve resources and protect the soil.

Zoning

Permaculture gardens are often zoned so that areas closer to the home or school are the ones that require most work. Then as you get further away from the centre, the areas need to be visited less often. This means the gardener uses time and energy efficiently. Using circular vegetable beds rather than rows is another permaculture efficiency saver – you can grow more plants in the same area and it's quicker to water them.

Zone 0: Centre of activities - the house. This is high maintenance, high use and requires considerable investment of time and energy

Zone 1: Annual plants, herbs, compost, bike store and other high use activities

Zone 2: Chickens, other animals, orchard, greenhouse.

Zone 3: Water storage, main crops, field shelters

Zone 4: Forestry, pasture, dams, forage, beehives

Zone 5: Wild zone, where nature is in charge and where we go to learn and harvest only that which is abundant.

Going with the flow

This means making the most of natural flows of energy and resources in the garden. Rainwater is harvesting and channelled using gravity to where it is needed (See Action Sheet 13 – 15). Buildings are constructed using the principles of energy efficiency (See Action Sheet 69), and the sun's heat energy is used to full advantage (See Action Sheet 64: Solar water heating)

Using biological resources to shelter and feed the soil

All organic matter produced in the garden is returned to the soil to feed it and keep it full of life (See Action Sheet 31) as compost and manure. Trees are planted to produce mulch, green manure and give shade and shelter (See Action Sheet 35: Agroforestry). Pests are controlled with natural methods, so as to avoid pollution and use of dangerous chemicals (See Action Sheet 33).

Recycling

All the leftovers from the kitchen are thrown on the compost heap - so that the waste can be recycled to improve the soil. With all the kitchen leftovers going into the garden, it is much easier to separate the other waste into recyclable materials (see Action Sheet 72: Reduce, Re-use, Recycle). Some waste might also be useful in the garden, like tin cans for plant pots.

Acknowledgements.

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More information

FTFA – www.trees.co.za Permaculture Association of Britain – www.permaculture.org.uk
www.permaculturevisions.com

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