

Permaculture: A Healthy Sustainable Alternative to Agri-Business and the Biotech Conglomerates

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Permaculture is a combination of two words, permanent culture, which evolved from a previous and narrower definition, Permanent agriculture. It is a way of life which nurtures and propagates a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, guided by its three tenets: earth care, people care, and fair share.

Permaculture, according to one of its founders, Bill Mollison, is:

“...a philosophy of working with, rather than against nature; of protracted and thoughtful observation rather than protracted and thoughtless labor; and of looking at plants and animals in all their functions, rather than treating any area as a [single product system](#).”



Image: Considerations at the center of the Permaculture philosophy. Image via [Northey Street City Farm](#).

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The monocrop, a large area of land where only one type of crop is cultivated, is a modern innovation that does not exist naturally. It is an easy way to produce a lot of one type of

crop over a short time. But, as time passes, the crop will use up the soils resources and will be unable to grow, which thus necessitates for fertilizers, which provide the plant with enough of the nutrients for it to grow. There is no natural balance. In the same way, the abundance of a single crop creates an environment where pests, rodents, bacteria, insects, etc., which thrive on this crop will readily multiply, thus necessitating pesticides in order to curb this. Farmers who have adapted the monocrop system soon realize that they have become dependent on fertilizers and pesticides as their depleted soil can no longer produce crops on its own. These farmers must continue to rely on non-natural and non-renewable methods of sustaining their crop and thus their livelihood, which has led to hundreds of thousands of farmers, reaping little beyond despair, committing suicide.

This system, including the fertilizers and pesticides, even without considering the genetically modified seeds whose predatory nature has resulted in billion dollar lawsuits, is neither healthy nor sustainable. It supplies us with the food we need, though the nutritional equality has been controversial, at the cost of exposing these dangerous pesticides to us and our environment. Yet, nature has provided us with a working system that eliminates all of these unhealthy elements. Permaculture stems from the incorporation of that natural system and adapting it into our modern lives.



Image: Unlike monoculture in which a tract of land is used to grow a single crop, permaculture cultivates many kinds of crops – leveraging multiple beneficial symbiotic relationships between organisms to promote healthy and sustainable crop production. Understanding and working with nature is an important part of permaculture philosophy.

Permaculture continues to extend beyond this by using natural resources to create buildings. Rammed earth, bamboo, log, or other natural ways to build homes have. By adapting a natural method of cultivation, we create a way for the earth to continue to be used for future generations, earth care, while still utilizing it for our needs, people care. By limiting our dependencies, by modelling after nature, and by helping each other through the

sharing of knowledge and resources, a simple but happy lifestyle can readily be achieved.

Utilizing the Principles of Permaculture

The principles and techniques of permaculture can be utilized in both rural and urban settings. Their utilization will not only facilitate both the sought after sustainability of resources and healthy lifestyles, but it will also create a sustainable civilization by limiting the reliance on large companies and government, whose huge power, so prone to corruption, has so often been at odds with humanity's best interests.

In rural settings, ecovillages, such as the ones cited below, already exist where communities of people live completely, or nearly so, off of the land. They grow their own food naturally, recycling one hundred percent of the waste. Livestock can be raised for consumption and as an aid to creating fertilizers. These resources and yields, when in excess, can be sold off or traded in order to obtain things that the village does not produce itself, or is in want or need of. Energy can be obtained through natural resources such as wind, solar, hydro powers, or even through the natural exothermic reactions that happen while composting. If these resources are lacking, or if the village does not want to be completely off of the grid, external power lines can also be harnessed. Many of these ecovillages will also generate income by offering classes or courses, such as Permaculture Design Courses (PDC) through which one can become certified in permaculture design. These courses also provide extra hands for labor and promote the exchange of new ideas.

These ecovillages can further promote their sustainability by providing services for those who live outside of the village. Private schools, resorts, retreats, and other such services, which follow the principles of permaculture, can be set up within the village to further generate revenue and raise awareness about this alternative lifestyle.

But one need not join an ecovillage in order to reap and sow the benefits of permaculture. There are many things that even someone living in a downtown city condo can do that will support sustainability.

Share resources. This is one of the simplest, yet, at times, one of the most difficult things to do. There are so many resources that we use by ourselves that we could have shared with someone else, cutting down on expenses and other resources.

Carpooling saves money on car related expenses, such as gas, insurance, and car maintenance. It creates less pollution and less traffic. It gives you an opportunity to spend more time with someone else, or even meet a new person. Get on a bus or a train. Reconsider if everyone in your family needs a car.

Living together with more people is another easy way to cut down on expenses per person. While doing so, many household resources can continue to be shared. Less cost per person on rent, heating, air conditioning, cable, internet, etc.

Renew resources. We are consumers who are constantly consuming and discarding things that we do not want or need. There are many products aimed at the consumer which produce pollution during their production and/or disposal, so by not using them we immediately help out the environment. And, in the long term, we diminish the market for such items and create a market for reusable or higher quality items. So use more of the sources we can renew and less of the ones that we cannot, thus creating less waste.

Instead of using plastic bags at a store, bring your own reusable bag. Instead of bottled water, bring your own reusable bottle. There are so many things that we use for only a short time and then discard. Try actively finding greener alternatives to these things.

Fruits, vegetables, and herbs, which can be eaten as food, taken as medicine, or even used as personal hygiene products such as shampoo, will produce seeds and/or can be grafted and used again and again. This makes up the backbone of permaculture, permitting us to grow our own sustenance in a healthy, renewable way. Plants recycle a lot of our wastes naturally, are easily grown, and produce healthy vegetables and other yields. One of the wastes that plants can recycle gray water, like water from our shower, assuming we are using natural soap, perhaps which we grew and made ourselves.

Amongst the things that we tend to discard often are food scraps. But there is a way to recycle these scraps ourselves. Normally, if left out in nature, they will decompose over time and turn into rich compost. But, there is a way to cut this time down greatly, yielding rich compost that can be used, sold, or given away, and it can be done inside a condo. It is called vermicomposting, or vermiculture. This compost can be utilized by our plants, which we can eat or put to other good uses, and then eventually cycle back to become compost. It is a very renewable and rewarding cycle. This cuts down on our trash, thus the cost to the city and to us, while providing us with something useful.

Another byproduct that we can yield from our disposed food is biogas, a natural energy that can be used to cook our food. Biogas digesters can be installed into sinks to collect and process certain foods.

Energy is all around us waiting to be contained and utilized. We use energy to power our cars, light our lights, cook our foods, heat our showers, and so much more. Energy that we buy tends to be expensive and not very good for the environment. But many of these things can be powered by alternative energy sources.

Solar cookers and solar heaters use concentrated sunlight to heat water or cook food. Many foods can even be preserved by drying it through the sun. These things can be purchased, made at home, or even printed using a 3D printer.

Solar panels can be used to convert solar energy into electrical energy. They are, however, expensive. Fortunately 3D printing is enabling them, and other similar products, to be produced at more affordable prices. Heliostats, solar collectors, parabolic mirrors, fresnel lenses, and other devices can be used to capture the energy of the sun and transformed into kinetic energy by using a sterling engine and then again transformed into electric energy with an electric generator. Many of these devices can be made at home using materials found at a hardware store.

Bicycles can be retrofitted in order to produce, and even use, electrical energy. This means you can power up a battery while riding a bicycle, and later use that battery to charge your phone, run some appliance, or even pedal your bicycle when you get tired. There are even companies, like Organic Transit, that sell hybrid pedaled cars that operate on a combination of electricity and manpower. In China more and more people are turning to cheap, small electric vehicles to get them around the city. Vehicles that save them money while emitting zero greenhouse gases.

These are just some of the ways we can create a more sustainable world to live in. By

continually asking ourselves how we can stop wasting things, we will find more green solutions.

As we adopt the permaculture way of living, our lives will start to change in many positive ways. We will save money, perhaps to the point where we start considering not having everyone in the family going to that office job. We become healthier by eating a more natural diet full of organic fruits and vegetables, making us less reliant on medicines and Big Pharma. We help the world be cleaner, preserving it for future generations. We find new ways for us to appreciate things, and discover creative ways for us to live. We enjoy a greater sense of community. And we help contribute to the process of making the world a more equal place.

Permaculture is a great way to lead a healthy and sustainable lifestyle. But it can be more than that. For those who are fed up with the growing power of the wealthy, the ever increasing difference between social classes, and the over extending reach of the government, Permaculture poses a solution as well. Often described as “a revolution disguised as gardening”, permaculture is a peaceful protest and a stance against these problems. We have the option to stop feeding the insatiable corporate machine which, in many cases, puts profit over people and present gain over long term loss.

Participating in this revolution is easy. Take public transportation. Bring a reusable bag when going shopping. Grow more vegetables. Share and renew your resources. Do what you can to help and encourage others to live the same way.

Through this equilibrium, we can achieve sustainability and true freedom. These are the powerful seeds of permaculture.

notes

1. <http://ecovillage.asia/>
 - a. Daruma Eco-Farm is a sustainable permaculture project located in Bang Phra, Thailand
2. <http://www.panyaproject.org/>
 - a. A 10 acre eco village in the north of Thailand, near Chiang Mai
3. <http://www.raktamachat.org/>
 - a. A 75 acre eco village in Korat, the Si Khiu
 - b. visitors@raktamachat.org
4. <http://www.mindfulness-project.org/>
 - a. A 34 acre project meant to serve as a model for ideal Buddhist lifestyle, promoting, among other things, sustainability including natural building
5. <http://hajjargibran.com/>
 - a. Orphalese Ecovillage is a 20 acre ecovillage in Nong Kai, North of Udon Thani, that focuses on natural living and spirituality
 - b. hajjargibran@yahoo.com
6. http://www.sulak-sivaraksa.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=154&Itemid=143
 - a. Wongsanit Ashram, a community with an alternative lifestyle grounded in Dharma, located in Nakhon Nayok
 - b. ashram@semsikkha.org
7. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Pun-Pun-Organic-Farm/181581223532>
 - a. A well known ecovillage in Chiang Mai, located down the street from the Panya Project, run (mostly) by Thais

- b. <http://www.punpunthailand.org/>
- c. punpun.farm@gmail.com
- d. 081 470 1461
- 8. <http://www.woofthailand.com/>
- a. Word Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms. A resource for many permaculture projects in Thailand, including several smaller or upcoming ones. Aims at exchanging labor for permaculture knowledge.

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Resources:

<http://lancaster.unl.edu/pest/resources/vermicompost107.shtml>
<http://www.organictransit.com/>

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