

Unplug Yourself from The Industrial Food System With Permaculture Gardening

Observe and Interact

Over forty years ago, Bill Mollison, with the help of David Holmgren, helped develop a blueprint for sustainable living. Mollison — an author, scientist, teacher, and biologist — spent many years working in and with nature. He came to the understanding that everything is connected and that the way we are living is killing us and the planet. He developed a system which integrated agriculture, horticulture, architecture, and ecology in a conscious effort to design landscapes which replicate the natural patterns found in nature. Mollison and Holmgren understood the value of observing nature. By observing nature we can design solutions which suit our particular circumstances while producing human settlements which are abundant in productivity (food) and pleasing to inhabit.

Earth Care, People Care, and Fair Share

Apart from the design principles, permaculture promotes three main ethics which many native cultures once practiced: Earth Care, People Care, and Fair Share. The key differentiator of Permaculture from conventional farming is that it is not just about the utilisation of resources in an efficient and effective way. It embraces ethics in design and teaches one to think more critically. These three underlying principles are in stark contrast to the modern food system which focuses on profit at all costs

Permaculture Works with Nature and is Regenerative

Most of us are all-too-familiar with the ill effect the industrial food system has had on our planet. Species extinction, ecosystem destruction, salinity issues, the removal of top soils, deforestation, overfishing, soil toxicity, and climate change are just a few of the externalities of an overly resource intensive system which leaves many with excess and many more people hungry.

The difference between permaculture and modern industrial agriculture is that permaculture works with nature as opposed to against nature. Permaculture is a design science which observes natural systems in an attempt to learn from what they offer in the way of design, stability, and resilience. Hence, permaculture looks at the whole system and values how it all works in a synergy of balance and abundance. Permaculture focuses on techniques and practices which help re-establish this balance by creating places of diversity and abundance through restoring natural habitats which benefit all — not just humans.

Permaculture Captures and Stores Energy

Our long distance agriculture uses vast amounts of energy. It takes approximately 2,000 litres of oil equivalents per year to feed and supply the average American. This accounts for about 19 percent of the total energy used in the United States. In industrialised countries today, one food calorie requires expending an average of between seven to ten calories of fossil energy. (1)

Permaculture captures and stores energy. How does it do this? There are a number of ways. The act of simply growing your own food is effectively storing the energy or sunlight that we receive each day. Any excess food can be preserved, dried, bottled, or canned. Hence we are storing this energy for another time. Today we truck in and ship goods from all over the planet. The simple act of storing excess foods you have grown in the summer saves significant amounts of energy.

Our reliance on long distance supply chains not only makes us vulnerable to external influences to the system but also leaves us blind to how, what, and where our food is coming from. We have no control over how and what is done to the food we eat. We have chosen to be dependent consumers as opposed to responsible producers. While not everyone has the luxury of a backyard or land there are many things which can be done to get started. Pot plants, planter boxes, community gardens, urban gardens, and land share schemes right through to local CSAs help reduce our reliance on long distance supply chains. The key to this is focusing on local solutions

Permaculture Produces No Waste

As a young boy my father drummed into me the mantra of “waste not want not,” and he was absolutely right. Another permaculture principle, “produce no waste,” is highly relevant to our throw-away, planned obsolescent model of production and consumption. Nothing is wasted on a permaculture property or site. Understanding the value of resources and the natural world allows us to see the connection and interconnectedness of all systems. Under the permaculture model

everything is composted, mulched, or recycled. Everything from food scraps and green waste to your own waste is integrated and used as valuable resources. That's right, while many would find it hard to fathom that human waste can be recycled, there is a growing movement of people who understand the importance of collecting and composting "humanure."

It has been estimated that every time we flush the toilet we launch 5 or 6 gallons of polluted water out into the world; that's 4.8 billion gallons of fresh water polluted by waste and then treated with harmful chemicals every day in America alone. (2) Each year over 450 million tonnes of nitrogen fertilizer is produced and sprayed, poured, and scattered across the planet. Most of this is in the form of anhydrous ammonia, ammonia nitrate, and urea. This equates to the consumption of between 3–5% of the world's natural gas production for this process alone. (3)

When you think about it, it is a no brainer that we should be making use of this valuable and easily accessible resource. The environmental benefits should also be considered. The environmental impact of treating your own sewage helps out on the eco-friendly front as there is less energy used and greater overall efficiency and less wastage along the way.

Article by Andrew Martin, author of [Rethink...Your world, Your future.](#) and [One ~ A Survival Guide for the Future...](#)