

# *The Bullock's Permaculture Homestead*

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Autumn Newsletter 2007 (v. 4)



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## News & Upcoming Events

- The Bullocks are on TV? Yep! Check out Peak Moment Television Episode 68 at the farm with Doug, Joe, & Sam. Peak Moment Television focuses on positive responses to energy decline and climate change through local community action. The episode can be viewed online at [http://www.permacultureportal.com/network\\_resources.html](http://www.permacultureportal.com/network_resources.html).
- We've also added some new audio clips to our website of Douglas speaking on site potential at the Abundance Ecovillage in Fairfield, IA and on Food and Nutrition at the Iowa EcoFair.
- Both our Permaculture Design Course and Teacher Training were big hits this year. Here are next year's dates:
  - Permaculture Design Course: July 13<sup>th</sup> – August 2<sup>nd</sup>
  - Permaculture Teacher Training: August 10<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup>Don't wait too long to sign-up!

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## Words from the Daver

Phew! Here we sit...summer is nearing it's end. We've taught our courses...we've grown our zucchinis...the apples are turning red...who could complain? It has been a hectic summer with a few new additions here at the Bullock's, such as a branched drain greywater system at Doug's house, a new irrigation system for our walnut grove, and freshly lined clay pond on top of the hill

(okay, so it leaks...but it's getting better!). Every time some project gets completed it's like another domino in line falling over. Soon we are looking forward to having our expanded solar pumping system completed with cascading ponds on the hillside to handle the overflow. It'll be grand, won't it?

Right now is really the first time since we started in the spring that I've had a chance to sit back and reflect on the season. Having just finished our summer course schedule, education has been on my mind.

The other day I was chatting with Michael Becker, a fellow Permaculture educator that many of you may know. We were discussing the broad question of, "What's missing in Permaculture education?" Permaculture has been around for over thirty years now. If it's as great as we all think it is, why isn't it happening in every household in America?

One problem I see in almost all education these days is a lack of follow-up. Everyone has been to a course, workshop, seminar, or lecture that has really inspired him or her. However, right after leaving the high level of energy that has been generated begins to dwindle a little bit. A week later, when one is once again embroiled in day-to-day life, that energy fades a bit more. A couple months later one may think about their paradigm shattering experience now and then, but it is unlikely that it has become a meaningful part of their routine.

It seems to me that in Permaculture education (or any education worth doing) that more follow-up is essential to help people incorporate what they've learned into their lives. Here are a few ideas I've been kicking around for ways this could be accomplished.

- **Letters to Self**  
Have your students write a letter to themselves six months or a year down the road. Have them write whatever they feel (plans, new ideas, resolutions, etc.). Then collect their letters and mail them out six months or a year later. The idea is that they will receive this letter and, along with it, a dose of the energy that was present during their experience. Hopefully this will reinvigorate them and encourage them to re-double efforts already underway or to tackle something new.
- **Follow Up Phone Calls**  
How many people have ever received a check-in call from their instructor? What if you did? What if one day, out of the blue, your phone rang and it was a teacher for whom you had great respect checking up on you (asking what you've been working on, if you have any questions, if you need any contacts, etc.)? It seems like a simple fifteen minute phone call could make a big difference in someone's drive to incorporate Permaculture into their life.
- **Place-Based Strategies (advanced courses, guilds, potlucks)**  
Encourage your students in the same bio-region to meet. In fact, encourage them to have regular potlucks or work parties. Get them to make plans together. They could give each other input on projects. Instructors can offer courses that build on of the Permaculture

design course in their area. Creating vibrant, local community connections seems like a great way to keep people involved in the Permaculture scene.

- Reunions/Convergences

The idea of annual reunions or convergences for folks who have participated in the education at a place seems good. Each year one could invite all of his or her past students for a daylong reunion, potluck, and campfire. Each year one would probably meet up with some of their local cohorts and have a chance to get updates from a few students who have gone far a field. Either way, this would be a great way to keep those students involved and to welcome students who have lost track of their Permaculture connections back.

- Internet

Listserves, online groups, photo sharing, MySpace, and other services can be a great way to keep a group of folks connected. By creating a thriving online community in which people can be active no matter where they are one can keep folks interested. Even if it is just a frequently updated website, people will check in more often if the updates happen frequently. This allows them to see what is going on at your site, what new opportunities are available, and how they can dial in further.

My goal for this year is to try out a few of these strategies and see what happens. You may not have realized it, but this newsletter is part of that strategy! For anyone else who is involved in Permaculture education I'd like to invite you to try to incorporate some of these strategies and let me know how they work out.

Anyway, I'll sign-off so as not to run the risk of rambling. I hope everyone has a great fall!

Dave

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### Lessons from the Old Home Place by Emmett Adam

A few minutes walk down the hill from the Bullock's place there's a lagoon at the head of Deer Harbor. At the back of the lagoon, tucked in a thicket of plums and guarded by a trio of overfed baby raccoons, lies the frame of a house and an old barn, listing with age. This old homestead was the first European settlement on these islands and, not surprisingly, was built in the same location as a summer residence of local indigenous peoples.

Nowadays the land surrounding the lagoon is mostly meadow and, thankfully, remains largely undeveloped. The fields were hayed for quite some time but having been let go in recent years; the succession that is taking



place is apparent from afar. Here and there tangles of rose, blackberry, and currant emerge from the tall grass, there are a few stands of young Douglas fir, and willows are popping up in the wetter areas. All of this is quite exciting, indeed, but does not come close to the thrill of seeing the fields peppered with feral fruit trees. Only a few of the apple, crab apple, pear, hawthorn, and plum seeds that found their way here were able to come up through the sod and grow above deer browse, but looking from the road one can see that even still, the trees are quite plentiful.

When my friend Judson returned from a recent exploratory circumnavigation of the lagoon he brought back news of more than just seedling trees. He told us that he had found an area near the back of the lagoon that was the site of an old apple and plum orchard, but that was also packed with seedling plums loaded with delicious fruit. The next day, four of us spent a few evening hours tromping around the lagoon, wading through thickets and stuffing ourselves with Myrobalan plums. In the farthest reaches of the lagoon we found hundreds of seedling trees hidden from the road in addition to ancient, gnarled apple and pear trees.

To most people, places like this might be seen as useless, crabby thickets rather than the amazing resource that they are. Whether they are on your land or not, areas such as these are excellent examples of what is possible when we interact with wild plants around us in a positive way. Feral fruit trees are great because not only can we stuff ourselves with plums and fall asleep under the tree with the raccoons, we can prune them and graft them to our favorite varieties to increase their value without having to do a lot of work. As Doug Bullock often points out, when we graft wild trees we don't have to dig a hole, we don't have to water the trees, a good rootstock for the area is already selected for us, and we get to eat good fruit in just a few years.

The land around the lagoon, just like land anywhere, is a place that reminds us to use what we have. We often seem to be so focused on establishing a Permaculture design or food forest from scratch that it is easy to forget about the resources that surround us, sometimes in the most unlikely places. At this summer's design course our teacher John Valenzuela described Permaculture as hosting a party. Our role as designers is to set the table, prepare the food, and invite the guests. Once the party is bouncing we might want to bring out an appetizer or change the music but the goal is to have the party take on a life of its own. With a little careful observation, however, it's easy to see that down by the lagoon and in countless places around us, the party has already started.

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### To Berm, or not to Burn, is there really a question? - Brandon Bauer

With the burn ban all summer long there is a tendency for a pile to accumulate in one corner of the yard. This pile usually consists of slash, branches, stumps, scrap wood, lumber with nails, perhaps a little cardboard, and other things generally called garbage or waste. These piles range in size from small home-sized to large development practice slash piles.

Energy can neither be created nor destroyed, and a tree is a battery collecting the sun's energy. We know that smoke, when we burn wood, is pollution, or waste. Wait, there's that 'waste' word again. Waste=unused energy. When one looks honestly at the situation, we are actively polluting

our air, our communities, and our families while wasting valuable unused energy. Our wood waste is our biomass, or our nutrient matter.

The lifecycle of a tree starts as a seed. By using the carbon-based energy of its predecessors mixed with sun and water, it grows to be the largest living organism on the planet, defying gravity for upward of nearly 120 m. In a forest environment a tree falls down and usually creates an enormous mess, bringing other trees down with it, leaving a twisted mass of crossed trunks and branches. Eventually, the leaves and needles fall off depositing a collection of nitrogen and minerals on the forest floor. These initial nutrients awaken the dormant, or otherwise preoccupied, soil life, the decomposers (specifically, various types of fungi, and micro-fungi). After these little creatures have finished breaking down complex carbon chains, then insects and other critters like sow bugs, termites, centipedes and even slugs come in. Along with water, these and other natural systems redistribute the sun and tree energy throughout the surrounding environment, making it accessible for the next generation of trees.

Imagine a group of trees standing on a hillside. What you see makes up only 50 to 55% of the total mass of those trees. The other half lives below the earth. When it rains a tree uses its leaves and branches as a means of slowly funneling water to its trunk roots. The leaves and needles also slow the rain drops from pelting the earth and removing the many years of food the tree has deposited on its own roots. Once the water has reached the forest floor, the woody debris that litters the forest holds the water, allowing it to percolate into the soil, held in the land itself. A tree in a forest environment holds its weight in water in the soil, and can support more than 10,000 living organisms in [the Pacific Northwest]. In the tropics that number is nearly ten times that amount. When we cut down forest, remove the stumps, and burn the branches we set the stage for very fascinating natural events. Two parcels in the Blackburn Lake Watershed were cleared of trees. The resulting surge of runoff and sediment clogged culverts forcing the lake to overflow onto the Fulford-Ganges Road. This also caused an algal bloom, higher levels of phosphates, heavy metals, and coliform bacteria in a local drinking supply.

I am not saying that cutting trees is a bad thing, and I am not telling anyone not to. I too heat my home with wood and live in a wood home. I am also a carpenter and find wood to be an attractive building material. What I am recommending are more sane land development and stewardship practices.

So what is a Berm? A berm is a giant woody compost pile. The difference between a berm and a compost pile is that a berm you don't have to turn, screen or move into your garden. A berm stays in place, and feeds the already present soil flora. You can add to it; you can make it a permanent fixture. Berms, over time, can become great wind, noise, and light screens. They can also be planted with trees that further protect your house from outside influences. If one was to quantify the sheer mass of a development's burn pile, it is the equivalent of one tree for every two



trees removed. So, when we burn, half of the total biomass of a forest ecosystem ends up in the atmosphere. With low-pressure weather systems, we further exacerbate on-ground air pollution. As we are beginning to learn, the greatest impacts we humans have on our environment are carbon emissions and air born particulate matter. Much of this carbon and biomass can remain in the environment to break down. If we place biomass in piles or rows across the contour of a slope, we begin to use our biomass to slow water, filter runoff and hold that precious water in the land. Also berms make great habitat. Wrens, sparrows, towhees, and juncos are just a few of the native birds that move in and find a warm protected home. Berms also act as mulch or tree habitat. If we plant our berms with shrubs, hedges, and trees, then we can really take advantage of the rich biological activity happening in a constructed ecosystem. From adding diversity to your gardens and homes, to saving water, blocking wind and noise, and creating habitat for local wildlife, berming has a place in a well-stewarded environment.

We may want or need to harvest trees, however this does not mean that we need to pollute the atmosphere while stripping the forest floor of all available and stored energy. Burning slash piles has a huge impact on your family, your community and your environment. Please remember this island does not belong to us. It belongs to the future generations of every living thing that exists today.

\*Brandon and his family practice Permaculture principles on their homestead on Salt Spring Island, B.C., Canada. His article was originally printed in “The Gulf Islands Driftwood.”

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### Contributions

We are always looking for good contributions for our newsletter. Here are a few guidelines:

- We prefer “how-to” articles, or articles of broad interest in the Permaculture community (e.g. how to make ice without electricity, a new design for a portable animal enclosure, new ideas about establishing community Permaculture guild, etc.)
- We prefer not to have project updates, project promotions, or other things that are not of interest to a wide Permaculture audience.

<u>Target Release Dates</u>	<u>Submissions Due</u>
Spring – March 1	February 15
Summer – June 1	May 15
Autumn – September 1	August 15
Winter – December 1	November 15

If you are thinking of writing an article, please contact Dave at [permaculture.dave@gmail.com](mailto:permaculture.dave@gmail.com) to discuss your topic and get ideas.

Thanks!