

# *The Bullock's Permaculture Homestead*

---

Winter Newsletter 2008-2009 (v. 8)



In this edition:

- News & Upcoming Events
- Words from the Daver
- Transforming Landscapes, While Transforming Ourselves: Travel, Empowerment, & Understanding in the International Permaculture Movement by Tanya Lemieux
- The Role of Permaculture within the Mainstreaming of Sustainability by Josho Somine
- Contributions

## News & Upcoming Events

- Upcoming Course Dates
  - Introduction to Permaculture – May 29-31, 2009
  - Permaculture Design Course – July 19 – August 8, 2009
  - Permaculture Youth Camp – July 19 – August 8, 2009

---

## Words from the Daver

Winter is fast approaching here in the Pacific Northwest. We've had an unseasonable nice fall, but we know that eventually we're going to get a real dose of winter weather. For us this is the season where our energy contracts. We spend a lot of time winterizing and working on inside projects. It is this break in the action that makes the rest of the year possible.

For many of us here in the temperate North, winter is the season to delve into books and focus on increasing knowledge from the armchair with a cup of tea. With Permaculture and sustainability fast becoming buzzwords, there is a corresponding increase in the amount of relevant literature at the bookstore or library. As such, I've been having discussions with some of my fellow Permaculture educators regarding what they consider to be their "Top Five" Book Lists for Permaculturists. Here are the top five books that some of our partners keep on their bookshelves:

*Michael Becker*

- Weslandia by Paul Fleischman
- Four Season Harvest by Elliott Coleman
- PC Designer Manual by Bill Mollison
- Sunset Western Garden Book
- The Hand Sculpted House by Ianto Evans



*Dave Boehnlein*

- Introduction to Permaculture by Bill Mollison – Concise and easy to read, this is the primary book I loan to people who are interested in Permaculture. It contains all of Mollison’s original ethics and principles in a digestible format.
- AHS Plant Propagation by Alan Toogood – This is how you can populate your Permaculture site without going broke. The pictures and descriptions are the best I’ve found.
- Tree Crops: A Permanent Agriculture by J. Russell Smith – In this work Smith proposes a whole new way of handling sloped agricultural lands in order to prevent erosion. If we did nothing but follow his advice we’d be a lot closer to sustainable.
- Gaia’s Garden by Toby Hemenway – While Mollison often speaks strongly to the revolutionary in me, his bluntness may not go far with someone’s grandmother. That’s where Toby’s friendly and very accessible work comes in.
- Design With Nature by Ian McHarg – In this well-written work, McHarg explains a variety of basic concepts used in Permaculture design including design by exclusion, cluster housing, and creating community through the designed environment.

*Paul Kearsley*

- Ishmael by Daniel Quinn - In a very simple dialogue, this book outlines some of the primary concerns that permaculture addresses. Modern cultural habits, indigenous wisdom, and the concept of progress are all integrated into an eye opening picture of the way things are today.
- Nexus: Small Worlds and the Groundbreaking Science of Networks by Mark Buchanan - With countless real world examples, Nexus outlines the fundamentals of systems thinking. Everything from the Mississippi watershed, the six degrees of Kevin Bacon and our own nervous system are examined and utilized to present an amazingly eloquent concept.
- Blessed Unrest by Paul Hawken - This is the story of the largest movement in human history. Like nature itself, this movement is organizing from the bottom up, with no defined leader, location or identity. A catalogue of over 50,000 grassroots organizations focused on environmental and social justice provides a nice reminder that we are not alone.
- Landscape Design Graphics by Grant Reid - A simple approach to drawing the wide world of plants. The stylistic representation shown in this book is an amazingly

accessible resource for anybody interested in putting their permaculture visions down on paper.

- [Transition Handbook](#) by Rob Hopkins - Step by step instructions for the design of a better world from the bottom up. Backed by functioning real world examples and a rapidly growing movement this book is a great guide to community organization and visioning a better future.

*Tom Ward*

There is a long list of science fiction and utopian fiction that would qualify for pulp fiction that feeds the Permaculture imagination. For an early one check out [Herland](#) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1905).

My current favorite author is Kim Stanley Robinson. He actually uses the term Permaculture in his more recent work. I was blessed to have tea with him last summer when he visited the Little Applegate Valley. I thanked him for holding Permaculture to the highest meaning: permanent culture. He is famous for the four book series on terraforming Mars. The trilogy [Red Mars](#), [Green Mars](#), [Blue Mars](#) is followed by the collection of essays [The Martians](#). This detailed exploration of colonization is the source of economic and ecological ideas for a constitution and laws that are studied seriously as the best ideas yet. His global weirding series, [Forty Days of Rain](#), [Fifty Below Zero](#) and [Sixty Days and Counting](#) mentions Permaculture as a necessary strategy for survival. We get written into a new federal government.

Sometimes fiction is truer than fact.

Hopefully that provides some reading material for everyone to delve into this winter. This list could be the upswing to those short days around the winter solstice!

I hope everyone has a great winter and enjoys the holidays.

Dave

---

[Transforming Landscapes, While Transforming Ourselves: Travel, Empowerment, & Understanding in the International Permaculture Movement](#) by Tanya Lemieux

This is a story of how Permaculture transformed the lives of two young Canadians...

At the beginning of November 2006, my partner Jesse left our home in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada on a three month journey to the homeland of Permaculture - Australia. Inspired by the teaching styles of Geoff Lawton and Bill Mollison, Jesse returned home determined to make Permaculture our full time occupation.

During the next year we implemented Permaculture designs and dug up lawns for any friend or neighbor brave enough to set us loose in their yard. Encouraged with the results, we were always

on the lookout for possible long-term land access, as feeding ourselves from our own garden became ever more important.

Little did we know where this search would take us. One of the many connections Jesse had made in Australia invited us to come and be part of their Permaculture project in Liston, NSW. What an opportunity! We would have access to land and to the Permaculture community that has been built in Australia over the last 30 years. After long months of being thrifty and saving pennies we conserved enough money to get to Australia. We gave away most of our possessions to friends and family and in September 2007 we left on that long flight not knowing when we would return.

Immediately, upon our arrival I attended a PDC with Geoff Lawton at the Channon in NSW. It was not until then, that I too became terminally infected by Permaculture design. The education that I gained from being around Geoff and Nadia was so much more than practical land design. I learned about how I could put my knowledge and energy to productive and positive use. I was able to work with cows, chickens and sheep, something I had never done before. It was an incredible and productive learning experience.

Over the next six months we balanced our time between the project in Liston and the Permaculture Research Institute, working to build confidence in the practical application of Permaculture design and soaking up knowledge from those around us. It was challenging, intense and deeply rewarding. The knowledge sharing and positive environment of the Permaculture community was one of the most enriching times of my life. The amount of meaningful, cooperative connections of which we are now a part demonstrates that the world is a positive and creative place.

What would we do, though, after our six months in Australia ended? It was during one of my musings on this situation that Nadia Lawton suggested a project in her home village, al Joufah, Jordan. Contributing to global Permaculture movement was always our intent, and Jordan was our new direction. At the time of our involvement the project was still very young, but we had space to learn and the support of Nadia's family during our stay. We could not pass up the opportunity to spend time with a new land, people and culture.

Again we collected our pennies purchased tickets and arranged a budget to stay in Jordan for six months - living, working and contributing as much as we could.

Our home, in Vancouver, is in a part of the world that often receives more than 1,500mm of rain in a year and rarely sees temperatures above 30 degrees Celsius. It is a force of habit to complain about the rain. Going to Jordan was important to us because we wanted the challenge of being somewhere so completely different from our home and daily experiences. We did not want it to be easy - a holiday or tourist adventure. We were looking to put our abilities to the test.

We left Brisbane, Australia February 26th, 2008 and arrived with no trouble in al Joufah, Jordan on the evening of February 27th, 2008. We spoke no Arabic and Nadia's family little English. After a week or two of adjustment time we began working with the land. At the end of our first

month we had a brief trip to Palestine where we taught a 5-day workshop on Permaculture. The trip into occupied Palestine is a whole other story.

When we returned to Jordan we hand-dug earthworks for water harvesting and harmonized the landscape with rock wall swales that had been built on contour by Nadia earlier on in the year. After many hours of digging and intensive soil preparation we planted 87 hardy pioneer trees above and below the three rock wall swales. Initially, we watered by hand making sure that each tree received proper care and attention. We redesigned the existing gravity fed drip irrigation system to ensure that all the trees could be watered easily and efficiently. All of this sounds so simple on paper but none of our efforts went perfectly and it was a steep learning curve but rewarding.



We made many mistakes and learned something new on a daily basis. Everyday life was teaching us heaps about the land, people and culture in the Dead Sea Valley. The challenges of this particular situation came in all forms. Not only were the practical aspects of design in such an arid climate difficult, the culture shock, completely altered living conditions, and acute health issues caused us to lose pace. All of this is standard issue when traveling.



In Jordan, like all places, the importance of locals becoming involved is key to the success of a project. One switched-on Jordanian equals magnitudes more than twenty well-intentioned foreigners. Only locals can truly understand the complicated dynamics of culture, protocol and poverty in the Dead Sea Valley. Having lived there during some of the hottest months of the year, Jesse and I can empathize, but never truly understand what it is like to be a permanent resident of the Valley. We were often

accompanied by locals and had the honor of being at the dinner table with them daily. This is

where we discussed life and family as well as Permaculture in a little English and our inadequate Arabic. We experienced the complex and completely different living environment of a traditional Bedouin/Arab community - learning about traditional medicine, Islam and the daily struggles of the people who live here. During our stay we earned a lifetime worth of practical experience.

The most important thing I learned about was the false and prevailing idea that people need to be 'educated.' The education many receive is different than ours. It fits their situation and immediate needs. In the absence of long-term formalized western style education the people of the Dead Sea have an abundance of everyday ingenuity. A very lean economy has forced creativity on the slimmest of resource bases. What is missing is empowerment.

The wave of western culture collides with the traditional communities and results in a disempowered people that do not feel capable of change. The reality is that they are fully capable of change, when the skills and knowledge that have helped them to survive in the past are reestablished. The wisdom contained in a traditional culture needs to be looked upon as valuable, not backwards or outdated. Working in a foreign land can often be frustrating, but one can never assume that local people do not wish to see change. No matter where Jesse and I have traveled in the world there is always room for better design. Whether we were in Vancouver, Liston, al Joufah or Palestine, building relationships was the most difficult and important part. Our success as teachers and designers was dependent upon our ability to understand people's needs, their comfort level and how we could help demonstrate the number of options people have at their disposal.

It was a journey that pushed us to the edge of our experience level in every aspect. We can only hope that we left behind half as much as we took away.

We now have our own Permaculture education centre in Canada, called Pacific Permaculture. We are teaching others everything we have learned and work to inspire others in the way that we have been inspired. We keep in touch with all of our friends in Australia and the Middle East family and hope to return some time in the future. Until that day we fan the flame of action from a distance.

A big 'thank you' to all who have offered support, encouragement and a place to rest our heads along the way!:

- \* Geoff and Nadia Lawton
- \* The Abu Yahia Family, al Joufah
- \* The Gemmell Family of Noosa
- \* Kelenik Pty Limited
- \* Milkwood Permaculture

\* Tanya and her partner Jesse presently reside on Denman Island, British Columbia, Canada where they divide their time between orchard work, fishing, mushroom hunting and Pacific Permaculture. Pacific Permaculture is a service which focuses on education and design in both urban and rural settings.

---

## The Role of Permaculture within the Mainstreaming of Sustainability by Josho Somine

When I first started visiting American permaculture sites in 1997, sustainability still felt like an underground movement, although it was a strong and fairly well connected network. The ecological cultural current extended back a few generations through hippie culture and at least as far as the work of Scott & Helen Nearing in the Northeast in the 1930s (not to mention other traditional farming families). Some even used the phrase ‘the invisible universe’ to describe this far-reaching but subtle extended cultural community. Although it constituted a comprehensive subculture, this movement remained on the fringe of the American consciousness, and if you tried to talk to most people about renewable resources, organic food production, or rainwater harvesting, you wouldn’t get very far.

Much has changed in the last 10 years, and these days sustainability is a mainstream buzzword (albeit often watered down or questionably applied). Deciding that permacultural work needs to reach prominent urban public spaces, I’ve entered graduate school in landscape architecture. I find that many contemporary dialogues in that profession, as well as in urban planning and sometimes even regional politics, center around designing for sustainability in a holistic sense: ecological, economic, and social. Republican candidates try to talk about alternative energy technologies, major corporations and civic governments have departments of sustainable development, and peak oil and global climate change are issues of concern for a majority of Americans.

Permaculture has been very effective internationally in the last thirty years, but has functioned primarily on a grass-roots, rural, site-based level. What, then, can its role be in a broader cultural sustainability movement, as the discussions and design problems move into mainstream and urban environments?

Graham Farmer and Simon Guy, architecture professors from England, have described six competing logics of sustainable design that can provide a conceptual framework for contemporary projects. The ‘*eco-technic*’ approach, which predominates in much urban greenbuilding, sees sustainability as a globalizing issue, to be resolved through extensions and revisions of modern technologies. The ‘*eco-centric*’ approach argues for major value shifts and cultural re-patterning towards stewardship values and low-impact decentralized development. (This is where permaculture has tended to lie as an ethical methodology.) The ‘*eco-aesthetic*’ approach, typified in much ‘organic’ architecture and design, sees built forms as a potentially transformative expression of social and even spiritual values, and emphasizes the metaphor over strict functional performance. The ‘*eco-cultural*’ approach advocates the preservation of regional and cultural diversity and traditions, preferring the local to the global. The ‘*eco-medical*’ perspective sees environmental health and human health as interconnected, and seeks to harmonize them through designed landscapes. And finally, the ‘*eco-social*’ view sees societal problems at the root of ecological destruction, and tries to reorganize cultural patterns into more egalitarian, enlightened forms, presuming that the ecological impacts will thereby be inevitably lessened. Each of these viewpoints has an integral consistency, and some design approaches

may partake of a few categories, but they can also easily come into fundamental conflicts over specific priorities. But if we're all in it together, just how much do our differences matter?

I remain quite confident in the integrity of the permaculture design course (PDC) curriculum, having seen it taught and taught parts of it myself several times. As a conceptual and pragmatic methodology for ecological design, it's as effective in many respects as most graduate programs in such subjects. It can, in many cases, be more readily applied to people's daily lives than most academic programs. If students successfully digest the compressed download that a PDC represents, and sustain the intention to modify their lifestyles and impacts, they are extremely well equipped to do so. However, in its conventional format as a 2+-week rural retreat, the experience remains inaccessible to most people, and making global sustainability work will depend much more on the bulk of humanity than on a kind of fringe elite. I know of just a couple instances where the PDC has made it into a multi-weekend curriculum in urban settings, and a few more where teachers at grade schools and colleges incorporate it into their work, and I believe that a lot more such endeavors are urgently called for.

Within the last few years global population dynamics have shifted such that the majority of the world's people now live in urban centers, and it is likely to be on this front that the global viability of sustainability will be decided. Aside from reaching these citizens with pragmatic solution-based education, there is a need for many more integrated urban demonstration sites, particularly at residential and neighborhood scales. Permaculture is exceptionally good at just this sort of local culture-building gesture. Many a lawn around the country has become a food garden to the moderate enlightenment of its neighbors, but except for a few pockets like Portland or Berkeley there are hardly any places with enough of these examples taking hold to constitute a visible and accessible urban network.

To continue to grow and evolve as a relevant movement, permaculture needs to move beyond the limitations of its original context, and the biases of its founding patriarch. Mollison chose to emphasize the homesteading farmer as a design context, but urban communities have a lot more leverage and relevance at this point. His unfortunate disavowal of aesthetic considerations has also resulted in many a productively lush, but scruffily illegible permaculture garden. Will Hooker, a college teacher in the Southeast who uses permaculture extensively, took a global tour of permaculture sites in 2000, and reported that of more than 100 locations, fewer than 5 were what you would call 'beautiful'. If permaculture design is really supposed to appeal to a significant portion of humanity, it must clearly do a better job than that. Culture-building requires engaging as many human sensibilities as possible, and using design strategies like aesthetics and place-making to re-envision sites as dynamic attractors of human energy as well as ecological vitality.

It's not that permaculture should just evolve to some higher form. Indeed, such 'succession', or the process through which a given ecosystem evolves towards a mature and stable state, is an outmoded ecological concept. Current ecological planning instead pursues an understanding of regional 'disturbance regimes', noting that an ecosystem is capable of moving in several different directions based on disruptive influences at multiple temporal and spatial scales. An understanding of these contextual forces and dynamics is critical to designing for systemic resiliency in the face of unpredictable futures.

---



All of this is much like stacking functions to design for catastrophe, which is to say just the kind of issue permaculture remains very well equipped to address. The problem of sustainability is something our great-grandchildren will also grapple with, and most meaningful cultural solutions will likely be regional rather than global. Reflecting this, permacultural practice should freely diversify and hybridize as it deepens, such that within a couple more generations its forms in the many bioregions of America may bear little resemblance to those in Australia, except in their abstracted principles.

I still hope to grow old in a permaculture community on the edge of a healthy patch of temperate forest, but I know full well that that sort of idyllic retreat will not be an option for most people in the world. In the next few decades, the American population is expected to nearly double, and the development pressures will be immense. Most of the critical work will be in guiding and altering the patterns of that development, whether at the scale of the neighborhood, suburb, or megalopolis. There will also be a tremendous amount of work to retrofit our crumbling modern infrastructures towards more ecological patterning. But permies can take heart, for as Paul Hawken has observed, when everything needs to change, the field of opportunity is wide open. And as Mollison reminds us, in chaos lie unparalleled possibilities for the application of creative order. Permacultural perspectives can and should be applied to every field of contemporary practice, which is just another way of saying that anything you want to do with your life is sorely needed by the world.

\* Josho Somine is a sculptor from northern California. He has worked and studied with diverse sites and communities nationally and internationally, including Earthaven Ecovillage, Occidental Arts & Ecology Center, and the Lama Foundation. He is presently studying design for ecoliteracy and green infrastructure in Seattle.

---

### 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 a 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.

- Target Release Dates

Spring – March 1

Summer – June 1

Autumn – September 1

Winter – December 1

- Submissions Due

February 15

May 15

August 15

November 15

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