

## **Bullock Permaculture Homestead Skill Building Program Detailed Description**

### Overview

One of the ethical underpinnings of Permaculture is “sharing the surplus.” Thinking about this ethic, our skill building program was born in 1993. We wanted to be able to share the knowledge, experience, and skills that we have accrued over the years so that others could benefit. Essentially, we feel that this skill building program is one of the best ways we can help encourage the expanding Permaculture movement.

Since we have started accepting participants we have realized benefits that we had not foreseen when the program was conceived (as is the case with most Permaculture systems). We have been able to improve our site remarkably and have been able to connect with some amazing people. With the same spirit in which our skill building program was born, we now seek to make it better for both participants and us. Below is a description for those who are interested in learning here.

### What makes one a good participant in our Skill Building Program?

We encourage people that are hard working, self-motivated, responsible, enthusiastic, passionate, and capable of living and sharing with others to apply. Maturity and cleanliness are both traits that will lead to a satisfying community living experience while here. Another important trait we look for in our participants is the ability to be self-directed. We are more than happy to give direction and field questions, but we do not have time for handholding. Also, we ask that people have some form of gardening experience before they get here and other skills are a plus.

There are several other traits we look for in our potential participants. We want people who are fully present and prepared for an intensive experience. The nature of the work we do here requires folks who will be present on-site and willing to put this experience at the top of their priority list. Those who are constantly drawn away from the homestead for parties, visits to friends, the lure of the city, shows, etc. will not get as much out of this experience as those who are able to focus their energy here, thus impacting the skill building program community as a whole. Participants, like residents, are stewards of this land and are all actively responsible for its care and development. Developing the awareness and focus it takes to steward land as diverse as this is perhaps the most important education one could receive during a season at our homestead. This is our earth, and we are all responsible.

We also look for high-energy people. The folks that tend to get the most out of this experience are those who have the energy to keep up with our pace here (which is pretty fast). If your energy level isn't very high whether due to physical illness/limitations or lifestyle choice, there may be experiences better suited to you elsewhere. Note, however, that this does not refer to physical strength or size; we'll take you whether you're a hulking beast or a small wonder, just so long as you're energetic and ready to get things done.

Similarly, we seek participants who are good at prioritizing and time management and who work efficiently. There is a lot going on at our place and it can be easy to get distracted and not accomplish important tasks. We expect a lot from our participants (more than a 9-5 job) and being able to manage your time wisely will be a critical skill to bring with you.

Finally, we seek participants who are physically, mentally, and emotionally fit. If you do not feel well in any of these senses, the reverberations will be felt throughout the Skill Building Program community. Therefore, if you are going through major life changes/challenges this intensive experience may not be appropriate for you at this point in your life. That call is up to you.

We aim to have twelve participants at a time, although sometimes this number is lower.

#### Prerequisites

We ask that all of our participants have some form of gardening experience. We also ask that each participant read Introduction to Permaculture by Bill Mollison before coming. You can find used copies online or order a new one from the Permaculture Activist. Preference is given to those applicants who have taken a Permaculture Design Course, as this forms a foundation for the skills you will acquire while here.

#### What kinds of things will I learn?

Every year is different. Depending on which projects we are tackling a participant could gain hands-on experience in numerous areas including: organic gardening, grafting, pruning, electrical, plumbing, irrigation, metalworking, carpentry, nursery management, pond construction, mushroom propagation, ferrocement construction, canning & food preservation, cooking, working with small animals, plant propagation, beekeeping, pedal-powered machines, natural building, mechanics, and more. Our Skill Building Program participants also have the opportunity to sell our nursery stock at the local farmer's market.

Upon arrival each participant will be placed in charge and guided in the stewardship of:

- a collection of annual garden beds
- a collection of perennial systems in varying stages of establishment
- a rotating monthly specialization (e.g. mushrooms, chickens, compost, etc.)

These responsibilities will allow each participant to take ownership over specific areas of the property and have the opportunity to learn firsthand about maintenance, repair, care, and benefits of a wide variety of systems.

Each summer we teach a two-week Permaculture design course (PDC) here on the land. This is a great opportunity for participants to gain a greater understanding of how all the systems with which they have been working fit together. The course usually takes place the last two weeks of July. Additionally, there are opportunities to share/teach your expertise with others before, during, and after the PDC. We also offer an Advanced Permaculture Design Course when we have enough sign-ups, for those who have already

taken a PDC. This is usually offered during the third week of August. All of our participants receive **one** of these courses for free in exchange for helping out behind the scenes (cooking, leading work projects, helping prep hands on projects).

### Skill Building Program Core Dates

On a temperate homestead, spring is the busiest season. Therefore, we need to make sure our participants arrive here early enough so we do not get behind. There are also tasks that need to be done before winter sets in.

During years with an early spring we highly encourage participants to get here as early as March 1<sup>st</sup> since our workload will quickly build up if we are already behind before the program officially starts. March is also the prime pruning and grafting season, so more experience can be gained with an earlier start. Officially, we ask our participants to be here for our entire set of “core dates.” Our core dates here on the homestead are March 25 – October 31. People are welcomed and encouraged to come earlier or stay later.

### Schedule

Here on the homestead our schedule varies. Participants can expect four full days of guided work here on the homestead (Fri – Mon) and three unscheduled days (Tues – Thurs.). Two of these unscheduled days may be spent on individual projects or interests, relaxing, hiking, swimming or seeking employment elsewhere. However, typically one of these unscheduled days each week is spent on the land working on farm-related projects. Often this will be your best chance to catch up on your gardening, perennial system management, or other skill development opportunities.

We understand that the rest of the world does not necessarily work on our schedule. We also understand that emergencies pop up now and then. Therefore, we appreciate that it may become necessary to be gone on a workday from time to time. However, we also ask that participants make up missed days on their unscheduled days. We find that if we frequently have multiple people missing from our Skill Building Program community we have difficulty getting our baseline farm maintenance taken care of. Missing people also leads to challenges with continuity and memory in some of our more advanced projects, and this can slow progress. Therefore, we would like people to miss guided work days only in cases of emergency or events you truly cannot miss. Please save your vacations for the winter.

Each week there will be two meetings. The first is a business meeting on Friday morning. At this meeting everyone here meets with the Skill Building Program participants to plan out our workweek, pass along information, announce comings and goings, etc. We also have meetings during the scheduled work weekend to check-in on projects and reorient as needed. Once a week in the evening, the Skill Building Program community does a “check-in” and logistics meeting where everyone has the opportunity to express anything they want to share with the group.

Workdays here on the homestead are structured in such a way that we can accomplish tasks that require the entire group or that require coordination and guidance. Therefore, we will spend our Fri – Mon mornings working together on the week’s priorities. The latter parts of the afternoon are often spent working on garden beds, perennial systems, and specialized tasks, but we also expect these activities to be worked on during the unscheduled days.

We finish breakfast and are ready to work each morning by 8:30am when we meet to organize and decide who will be working on what. We highly recommend cultivating your inner “morning person” to be most successful in our program.

### Money

In order to support the Skill Building Program we have created a “Land Fund.” Each participant is asked to contribute \$250/month to the land fund. This money is then spent to:

- Purchase materials for projects (*e.g.* horticulture & construction supplies)
- Pay a stipend for the participant coordination
- \$20/person/month is returned to the Skill Building Program community to purchase bulk food
- Group tools
- Skill Building Program phone line and Internet connection
- Gas, propane, etc

In order to reserve your spot as a participant we will ask for your first two month’s land fund payment (\$500) up front. If you change your mind and cancel at the last minute your deposit will be forfeit.

Also, if possible, we recommend that you come with a little money squirreled away. Late spring is the leanest time in the garden here, so this is when outside food costs will be highest. By late summer, the “Skill Building Program food kitty” is usually taking care of us from visitor contributions and many of our food needs are being met by the garden. Having a little extra money can take away a lot of stress during the leanest time of year.

Most participants work at least one of their unscheduled days each week to pay land fund and save some money. Wages on the island range between \$15-20/hour depending on skill level. Most of our participants find that paying the land fund contribution is easily done by working two-three days/month. Orcas Island has lots of service-oriented work available and one can often walk away with more money than they came with.

We do ask that participants remain here on the homestead (not working offsite or taking vacations) during a few specific times:

- the week before our Intro to Permaculture Weekend Workshop in May
- the week before the Permaculture Design Course
- the entire two week Permaculture Design Course
- the week before the Advanced PDC

- the week long Advanced PDC

Please plan accordingly when you arrive and start seeking summer employment.

Finally, we suggest making a rough budget for yourself before you come here. Working two days a month at standard Orcas wages (16 hours x \$18 = \$288 per month) should provide enough money to pay land fund and extra food costs. If you have a lot of extra expenses (student loans, credit card debt, cell phone bill, car payments, etc.) you should think about how practical it is to meet your financial obligations here without burning out.

### Community

There are three Bullock family units living here on the homestead. The Skill Building Program participants comprise a fourth community. During the cold parts of the year participants share an indoor kitchen space in one of our greenhouses. When the weather is nice we have a spacious outdoor kitchen. We spend a lot of time together eating, working, and hanging out, so be prepared for a highly social experience outside of hosting visitors. A lot of knowledge and skill-sharing happens between skill builders, too, and is an important part of the education we receive here!

Household tasks such as cooking, dishes, cleaning, preparing shower fires (if there is no sun), recycling/dump runs, etc. are all part of living here and all are expected to share these responsibilities. There are also rotating monthly specializations (see the “What kinds of things will I learn?” section) to allow participants to experience and take ownership over the many areas of daily life here that need attention.

The homestead has become a place of interest for many with visitors dropping in throughout our work week. We attempt to limit the number of visitors at any one time, but Skill Building Program applicants should be aware that they will be constantly sharing their living space with interesting and sometimes challenging visitors throughout the season. This networking opportunity is one of the many benefits of living at the homestead.

We also host a potluck that is open to the entire Orcas community once a month, or possibly more often if people are interested.

### Accommodations & Amenities

Most of our participant lodging consists of tent platforms that can have tarps strung over them. Lodging is handled on a first come, first serve basis. Outhouses and hand-washing sinks are located throughout the property.

Amenities offered here include:

- Solar hot showers on sunny days
- Swimming pond
- Wood fired hot showers on cloudy days
- Wood fired sauna

- Propane stove and oven
- Wood fired bread & pizza oven!
- Local telephone service & voice mail
- Wireless Internet access
- Access to our library
- All the food you can grow and harvest while sharing the surplus
- Local saltwater access (for kayaks, quick dips, etc)

#### What to Bring/Get

- Camping gear (tent, sleeping bag, sleeping pad, etc.)
- Flashlight
- Clothes for a variety of conditions (30°F - 90°F)
- Raingear
- Good footwear
- Hand tools
  - Each participant is required to have a secateurs (hand pruners), kama (Japanese sickle), and hori hori (Japanese digging tool). We also recommend a grafting knife, a pruning saw, and a sharpening stone. If you have these items bring them. If not we can help you get them at wholesale prices when you arrive.
- Alarm clock, watch, or whatever you need to get up in the morning and keep track of time throughout the day.

#### Interested?

Do you have further questions? Is your interest piqued? If so, please contact our Skill Building Program Coordinator at [skillbuilding@permacultureportal.com](mailto:skillbuilding@permacultureportal.com).