



## **A beginner's guide to Permaculture**

The most difficult question you can be asked about permaculture is what is it? Its initial attraction for me is that here in one place was someone talking about all the different aspects of living in which I was interested. Also the literature seemed to be about practical solutions which we achievable by ordinary people. energy efficiency, organic growing, community finance, making do with the resources you have.... Is this Permaculture?

No it isn't. You will find these subjects in any overview but none of them are the heart of the matter. What is it? Infuriatingly you will get a different answer from every person you ask. Perhaps the that is the clue. 'The Truth, (a much sought after commodity) varies according to the individual's viewpoint. What is true for me isn't necessarily true for you, nor indeed is this morning's truth the same as tomorrow's. Permaculture is a set of non-rigid guidelines that can meet differing needs to achieve a green planet

The term was coined by an Australian, Bill Mollison, to imply permanent agriculture. Bill wrote a book with a student of his, David Holmgren, called *Permaculture 1* outlining a vision of tools to rebuild sustainable community life, which treads lightly on the Earth.

Seeing the ecological damage wrought by a burgeoning and increasingly industrialised human race on the planet, Bill and David made a template for designing ways of living which would enable the planet to become more fertile, more abundant, instead of slowly drowning in our own filth. *Permaculture2* followed, a more practical guide to planet care, based on further experience. After a further 10 years of incomparable work Bill Mollison completed the *Permaculture Designers Manual*, an unrivalled catalogue of skills and insights built on world wide experience of thousands of practitioners of his early bold vision.

I personally believe Bill has invented very little. He has done very little. And that is the secret of permaculture's success. It tells us that rather than work ourselves into the ground we need to see better. There is more reward in recognising how elements in our life can be placed to be mutually beneficial than there is in slogging away maintaining unsustainable systems.

Careful design in the key. Think of tribes living on the North African desert. They can survive for generations on a culture devised



around date palms, sparse scrub land, camels, goats, and a few simple grains, why?

Because they understand and use the maximum number of beneficial relationships between all the elements of their savagely unforgiving environment. Some tribes in the Sahel envisage perhaps a 100 years between needing any external inputs. They reckon Manhattan island couldn't last 24 hours without external inputs, so who is the more civilised?

The Permaculture institute is a world wide body that teaches people (including all its members) the art of seeing. We qualify designers what can help people, not to become self sufficient but be completely enmeshed with their immediate community. We work (or do as little work as possible) to maximise the amount of our needs which are met by our home environment and to minimise the unwanted outputs we produce.

We try to empower people to take control of their own lives. If you see something that needs doing, then give yourself permission to do it. Bill Mollison once said, I have one desire, that is to green the planet. I don't think I can do it on my own, I think it might need three of us. 'We aren't against leaders; we're for a world where everyone rejoices in their powers of leadership.

*"We don't want a world fit for our children any more.  
We want one that's fit for us, now."*

Within these guidelines some strands emerge for each person as especially important. I find gardening the best paradigm. In Permaculture you agree to garden. Not just because it enables you to eat good food and to understand the processes our basic necessities can be made healthy and available but because gardening exhibits all the qualities of planet care in a possible way. It is small scale, local and something for which you can take personal responsibility. It is a great symbol for the level of intervention we can make to meet our needs, still leaving the Earth more rich than we found it.

One day you will revel in explaining permaculture, even if it seems hard to define at first.

Graham Bell