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Permaculture: solutions for an uncertain future

— JAVAN BERNAKEVITCH

What permaculturists are doing is the most important activity that any group is doing on the planet. —David Suzuki

Why would Canada's leading environmentalist say this? And why are so many others agreeing?

Now over 40-years-old, Permaculture is proving itself: provide on-the-ground, affordable, practical, positive solutions to create happy, healthy and wealthy lives.

Permaculture began with Bill Mollison in Australia. While observing a forest, he pondered, 'this forest doesn't need fertilizing, weeding or watering and yet it still provides for all the life within it.' Mollison then went on to design 'food forests' that provided food, fuel, fibre, and medicine for human consumption with minimal human effort. This principle, to undertake the least amount of action for the most benefit, is central to the movement.

Such principles have produced some incredible results, both here and abroad:

- Geoff Lawton established a food forest in Jordan, 400m below sea level in salted soils (Greening the Desert video on Youtube). Using swales (water-harvesting ditches on contour) the scarce Jordan rainfall had a chance to be held in the soil, providing for fruit trees and even mushrooms (which shocked local caretakers who had never seen mushrooms before as there had never been enough water to grow them).

- Sepp Holtzer established over 72 ponds and 9,000 fruit trees 1500m above sea level in the Austrian mountains. He raises fish for profit (called aquaculture) and, with his fruit trees and other crops, provided for his livelihood. 'Once planted, I do absolutely nothing,' Holzer

told Reuters. 'It really is just nature working for itself—no weeding, no pruning, no watering, no fertilizer, no pesticides.'

- Closer to home, Brandon Bauer created a perennial (producing year-after-year) garden system on Salt Spring Island. During the farm's seventh year, human effort dropped to 10%. What happened to production in Year 8 after this dramatic change? Nothing—the farm produced at the same levels as Year 7. Bauer essentially created perennial food systems that required less work and maintenance over time.

Permaculture is the thoughtful observation of a 1,000-acre farm or a 3'x6' balcony. With observation, we can interpret and create systems for food and for communities. It means

harmonizing with existing patterns to achieve maximum benefit.

For individuals, permaculture means less money, energy and time to produce more food; the ability to 'see' resources where others only see 'waste'; tips and strategies to conserve energy and strengthen communities; and real-world solutions to increase happiness, health and wealth.

Taught in a three-week format, the Permaculture Design Certificate is a great education opportunity to acquire theory, hands-on experience, tools, methodology and skills. Permaculture BC is hosting a local Permaculture Design Certificate course on Salt Spring Island this summer from June 26–July 15. ☞

Learn more about permaculture or register for a course at www.permaculturebc.com.



Permaculture students getting their garden growing.

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