


## Using Energy and Resources Intentionally and Intelligently – Principles for your Home, Garden, School and Business

by Bonita Ford

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Imagine planning your garden or making decisions for your organisation in a way that puts your time and energy to best use, while creating the outcomes that are most valuable to you. At its simplest, permaculture design can be described as a way of thinking, making decisions and designing things, based on the way nature works.

Permaculture and its design principles come from observing natural systems, and include both indigenous and scientific knowledge. It can be applied to physical things – like houses, gardens and landscapes – as well as to “social” things – like school curricula, organisational planning and business models. In permaculture, we aim to help ourselves, our communities and culture take care of our needs, while taking care and giving back to the Earth as well.

Let's explore three principles here: starting small; observing and getting feedback; and multiple functions.

Whether starting a garden or starting a new business, we can start small and slow. Starting small means focussing our resources and time intensively, whether it be on one or two new garden beds, or one or two new projects. When we start small, we can minimise our input of resources, and give more time and attention to monitoring the outcome of our efforts. Starting small allows us to keep our mistakes small as well. We can take what we've learned, building on our successes and adding new projects - slowly, surely and intentionally. This principle encourages us to ask: What is the smallest change we could make, for the greatest impact possible?

In permaculture, we invest a lot of time and energy into observing the system. Whether in an ecosystem or in an organisation, we observe and notice existing resources and opportunities for change. We want to have an understanding of how things connect and flow. We are intentional about where to place things and how to connect things in relation to each other. Where is the sunniest spot in the garden and what plants (or other elements in the system) might benefit most in this spot? How does work flow between different people in the organisation? When we introduce something new, which we hope will improve the system, we want to look and listen for feedback. If we plant daylilies around the apple tree, how do they all respond? If we start a weekly meeting in our organisation to help two departments work together, how does everyone respond? This principle reminds us to observe what already exists, and to observe when we introduce changes.

When we design using a permaculture approach, we want every part of our system to have multiple functions. If we are going to invest our energy into planting a tree, or creating a new website for our organisation, we want to maximise our returns. So we could choose a type of tree that could provide: food, beauty, shade, privacy, habitat for birds, flowers for bees, wood for crafts, and so on. For our website, we might want it to: highlight our services, get the public involved in our organisation, be a place where the public and staff could go for useful information, provide an easy way for the public to communicate with us and for staff to

communicate with each other, and so on. This principle, sometimes called "stacking functions", helps us to maximise our energy and resources, and get the most outputs from what we put into the system.

Permaculture design principles can help us use our resources intentionally and intelligently. By looking to the natural world as the teacher, we can learn to do less wasteful work and create systems that are more fruitful. If you are interested in learning how to apply eco-logical thinking to your garden, to your organisation or to your life, I encourage you to learn more about permaculture. It's a tool that can serve multiple purposes, while supporting the well-being of people and the Earth.

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