



Thinking about the beautiful land on which we will grow food at our new center, there are many aspects of the project to consider. In the last issue of *Global Tea Hut*, we touched on the topics of Land Guardianship and Sustainability as they pertain to our food system. This issue, I would like to take a look at some components of Permaculture.

Permaculture is derived from two words, “permanent” and “culture.” If you consider the nature of these two words, what comes to mind are the notions of durability, endurance and a sense of long withstanding, combined with the notions of art, customs, tradition, people and location. What we have is the overall sense of a perennial system, and in terms of agriculture, that is akin to Nature itself. Nature is intelligently chaotic and grows for the long term. Clean-cut lawns and tidy, kept backyards don’t stay organized for long without human management. All systems tend towards entropy or disorder. If left to Nature, there would be deep roots, weeds where necessary, healthy soil, recycled materials, and patterns and cycles that endure the ages. In a world where mono-cropped agriculture systems are just the opposite of Nature, small, intense and biodiverse perennial food systems such as those employed by Permaculture are a turn in the right direction.

Permaculture isn’t just about growing food, however; it is a complete design-system approach to farming and creating sustainable human settlements, and our new land has the design potential for just that: growing some food and building a sustainable tea center dedicated to Cha Dao, meditation, and Nature. Along with our vegetable garden, we will also be implementing components of Permaculture in our tea garden design and the building of the center itself. But for the sake of this newsletter, and because I’m no authority on the subject, I’ll be focusing this article on the food growing aspects of Permaculture. That’s also the nice thing about Permaculture: it need not be employed in its entirety. Anyone can practice it; at home, at work, on your windowsill, around the balcony, in your backyard and so on. It’s suitable for striving towards any system that is more ecological and/or sustainable, no matter how big or small that system is.

It’s important to note that Permaculture is not a new body of knowledge so much as it is a rebirth of ancient wisdom from times gone by. In fact, many of you are already practicing aspects of Permaculture and without even knowing it. As well, people have long been practicing Permaculture for hundreds if not thousands of years. The term was coined in the 1970s by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren, the pioneers of Perma-

culture as we know and practice it today. Any applied ecological design that accounts for water, soil, climate and plants is an aspect of Permaculture. So whether you are catching rainwater or digging swales, composting or mulching, observing weather patterns or cycles within Nature, growing food or building green homes—you are practicing Permaculture.

What makes Permaculture really unique is the way it highlights and utilizes ecological networks and interconnectedness to create closed systems which meet their own needs internally. What this entails is observing components of a system, noting their inputs, outputs, and functions, and then implementing them in such a way so as to benefit each other naturally. There are so many factors to consider, and somewhere along the web of life they are all networked. For one simple example, on our land we have a lot of rocks to make use of. Rocks absorb and radiate heat, take up physical space, generate microclimates and create shelter. Immediately, proper use of this abundant resource can aid in warming the soil, creating boundaries, casting shade and becoming a home for insects, snakes and spiders. Woven together will be an underlying theme in our garden and landscape design. It only makes sense. We need only but look to Nature, in all Her perfect, chaotic balance and harmony.

It does little good to break a system down into its constituent parts and analyze each component individually to get an idea of how everything gels together. The whole is always greater than the sum of its parts. A higher intelligence is at play when things operate inter-dependently.

We need to treat the land like a living organism that breathes, grows, decays and changes—because it does! It’s alive and our design should account for that living quality. This isn’t just some inert piece of land upon which we find ourselves; it’s more akin to the ocean: undulating, ebbing and flowing with microorganisms, worms, spiders, centipedes and countless other soil dwelling beauties that till the good earth, convert and transfer compounds, and ultimately participate in a network with a vast spirit and intelligence.

In light of all of this, here is what the food system will be like at *Life Meets Light*: it will, of course, yield vegetables, herbs, compost crops and fruit trees in a variety of garden bed designs: raised, double dug, sheet mulched and possibly done in a mandala design that will titillate both the eyes and the appetite. The garden beds will be mulched to protect our soil, create shelter, block out weeds, hold in moisture and feed the soil. In designing the garden beds, we will increase the



surface area around the perimeters to efficiently plant more food in the same amount of space. Rigorous composting will be carried out to supplement the soil. I would like to install a banana circle compost pit and set up both regular composting stations and vermicomposting bins. The banana circle will not only generate humus-rich soil, but also yield food, shelter and microclimates. The vermicompost will generate worm castings and liquid fertilizer. Vertical space will be utilized in the form of hanging baskets, stacking and building an herb spiral. Water from the nearby river will be used and bamboo from the center's grove will be utilized as trellis, water canals, boundary markers and so on. I would also like to catch rainwater and possibly redirect the center's greywater for use around the property. With so much water, we could install water features to attract birds and insects and also to create more microclimates. I could go on, but essentially what we are aiming for is a balanced and sustainable ecosystem that mimics Nature, promotes biological diversity and offers some food in the short and long term.

Applying Permaculture requires a lot of observation. What I'll be doing from now on is recording as much information as possible like soil type, rainfall, sun exposure, cloud coverage, prevailing winds, exist-

ing plant, animal, and insect species, climate, microclimates, available resources, etc. In this way, I can become better acquainted with this land and its Spirit, and better design a sustainable, closed, perennial food system.

This project is still a ways off, but it's exciting to be designing it now and sharing that prospect with all of you. As times goes on and plans unfurl in more detail, I'll of course keep you updated on how things develop and change. In the meantime, please also let us know of any comments or suggestions you might have for our food system. I have a whole slew of other sustainable, self-sufficient, ecological projects in mind as well, but it's important to start small and build progressively. This center is as much yours as it is ours, so if you have a green thumb we'd love for you to make a print!

"Apprentice yourself to Nature. Not a day will pass without Her opening a new and wondrous world of experience to learn from and enjoy."

- Richard W. Langer