

# sustainable choices **permaculture**

Permaculture is a common sense and practical approach to sustainability, integrating together themes like organic growing, local resources, waste minimisation, energy efficiency, community action, ethical trading and taking responsibility for your own environment.

The word permaculture, coined by Australians Bill Mollison and David Holmgren during the 1970s, is a portmanteau of permanent agriculture as well as permanent culture. Through a series of publications, Mollison, Holmgren and their associates documented an approach to designing human settlements.

## **Core values**

Permaculture is a broad-based and holistic approach that has many applications to all aspects of life. At the heart of permaculture design and practice is a fundamental set of 'core values' or ethics which remain constant whatever a person's situation, whether they are creating systems for town planning or trade; whether the land they care for is only a windowbox or an entire forest. These 'ethics' are often summarised as;

*Earthcare* – recognising that the Earth is the source of all life and that we recognise and respect that the Earth is our valuable home and we are a part of the Earth, not apart from it.

*Peoplecare* – supporting and helping each other to change to ways of living that are not harming ourselves or the planet, and to develop healthy societies.

*Fairshare* (or placing limits on consumption) - ensuring that the Earth's limited resources are utilised in ways that are equitable and wise.

Everyone needs to eat and drink, and it is the issue of food production where permaculture had its origins. It started with the belief that for people to feed themselves sustainably they need to move away from reliance on industrialised agriculture. Where industrial farms use fossil fuel driven technology specialising in each farm producing high yields of a single crop, permaculture stresses the value of low inputs into the land and diversity in terms of what is grown. The model for this was an abundance of small scale market and home gardens for food production with food miles being a primary issue.

**Permaculture is a design process with sustainability at its heart, concentrating on learning from nature, developing ideas from observations, turning patterns into principles and applying those principles to achieve productive and sustainable outcomes.**

“ *The only ethical decision is to take responsibility for our own existence and that of our children* ”

(Mollison, 1990)

## **Holmgren's 12 design principles**

These restatements of the principles of permaculture appear in David Holmgren's *Permaculture: Principles and Pathways Beyond Sustainability*.

**Observe and interact** - By taking the time to engage with nature we can design solutions that suit our particular situation.

**Catch and store energy** - By developing systems that collect resources when they are abundant, we can use them in times of need.

**Obtain a yield** - Ensure that you are getting truly useful rewards as part of the work that you are doing.

**Apply self-regulation and accept feedback** - We need to discourage inappropriate activity to ensure that systems can continue to function well.

**Use and value renewable resources and services** - Make the best use of nature's abundance to reduce our consumptive behaviour and dependence on non-renewable resources.

**Produce no waste** - By valuing and making use of all the resources that are available to us, nothing goes to waste.

**Design from patterns to details** - By stepping back, we can observe patterns in nature and society. These can form the backbone of our designs, with the details filled in as we go.

**Integrate rather than segregate** - By putting the right things in the right place, relationships develop between those things and they work together to support each other.

**Use small and slow solutions** - Small and slow systems are easier to maintain than big ones, making better use of local resources and produce more sustainable outcomes.

**Use and value diversity** - Diversity reduces vulnerability to a variety of threats and takes advantage of the unique nature of the environment in which it resides.

**Use edges and value the marginal** - The interface between things is where the most interesting events take place. These are often the most valuable, diverse and productive elements in the system.

**Creatively use and respond to change** - We can have a positive impact on inevitable change by carefully observing, and then intervening at the right time.