

PERMACULTURE GARDENING FOR THE ABSOLUTE BEGINNER

FOLLOW NATURE'S MAP TO GROW YOUR OWN ORGANIC
FOOD WITH CONFIDENCE AND TRANSFORM ANY BACKYARD
INTO A THRIVING ECOSYSTEM

JOSIE BECKHAM

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INTRODUCTION: TO PLANT A SEED



Inside every seed is the potential for an incredible harvest.

— FARRAH GRAY

I'll never forget it.

It wasn't a special occasion, not a holiday or a celebration, but that ordinary family dinner is one I'll always remember.

My Great Aunt Shelby declared that my collard greens were the best she's ever tasted. Coming from a woman raised in the South, this is like the Oscar of compliments.

And she wasn't the only one who loved them. The bowl went *fast*. Even the kids, who usually turned up their noses at green food, went in for seconds.

I remember the warmth of that smile that spread across my face. I knew why the dish was such a hit. Not because I'd used some new recipe or secret ingredient. The difference was I'd grown those collards myself. Straight from the earth to the kitchen table, with nothing in between.

I'd say the moment filled my soul as much as it did their bellies.

And to think, it all started with *one simple seed*.

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Well, friends, it's like they say. "*Never underestimate the power of planting a seed.*"

So, what does it mean to plant a seed?

Literally, it means putting a tiny, dormant plant embryo in the ground, caring for it, and watching it grow.

Then, someday later, it means basking in the approving smiles of Great Aunt Shelby and the delight of your kiddos as they excitedly chow down upon your own home-grown organic veggies. Now that's a satisfying harvest!

However, planting a seed can also mean starting something new. Planting an idea and watching it blossom into something extraordinary.

Permaculture starts with an *idea*. It's the idea that humans and nature can work together in this remarkable, harmonious way, where we *all thrive together*.

Resilience. Resourcefulness. Interconnectedness. Multiplication. Abundance. Those are pretty fun words! And they're all included in the satisfying harvest of planting this seed.

Let's take another gander at our metaphorical seed packet here.

Permaculture explores the question: What if there were *timeless principles* we could tap into in order to cultivate life here on Earth to its fullest potential? It also answers with an excited, "Yes!" It's true! *And*, there is latent power all around us that we can harness, which has been at work since ... well, *forever*.

Although "permaculture" may be a word of the last century, nature has been living it since the dawn of time. One needs only to step into the wild, lush forest with an open mind to be amazed by the remarkable circle of life at work.

See, natural ecosystems are awe-inspiring because they can *maintain and regenerate themselves*, and have done so for many years. In this book, we'll explore what this could mean for our lives and gardens.

For now, a simple example. Think about the lifecycle of an apple tree. The tree grows from a seed. It drops fruit that deposits more seeds. As the fruit rots, it fertilizes the soil. New apple trees sprout from that same soil. Multiplication, abundance, so on and so forth. This is a self-maintaining and regenerating system on a tiny scale.

Well, by mimicking nature — *watching* and *replicating* how its complex parts work together — we can create self-sustaining mini-ecosystems right in our own gardens and farms. In essence, we can "bring the forest back home."

And here's the fun part: we can do this *anywhere*.

Whether on a farm across the globe, or right in your own backyard: permaculture principles can powerfully influence projects of any scale and in any place.

The ideas of permaculture have certainly grown and spread around the world. More people are catching on. *There's a better way to grow food, and it's been around for a long time*. It's a back-to-our-roots kind of idea in the truest sense!

When I started my homestead, I had no idea what "permaculture" was. I just knew I liked animals, nature, and producing my own food. I was tired of relying on whatever produce the grocery store had in season. And I felt like there was a better way to utilize my space that was lower-maintenance, cheaper, and had less of an environmental impact.

When I discovered what permaculture was, something clicked. The more I learned about its ideas, the more I thought, *this just makes sense*. So the seed was planted, and it kept growing.

On the one hand, I realized something cool: in many ways, I had basically been practicing parts of permaculture all along! And on the other hand, I wish I'd found out about this sooner! I couldn't wait to learn more about these ideas and incorporate them more and more into my life & homestead, and *make everything better*.

Because, simply put, *permaculture works*. And it gives so many great solutions for living out the ideals and dreams that are important to me, and even vital for us as a human race!

Maybe you can relate with me. Check YES if any of these statements apply to you:

- You're blown away by the ever-increasing grocery store food costs, especially fresh meats, fruit, and vegetables.
- You're concerned about the chemicals they might be putting in the fruits and vegetables you buy at the grocery store. This includes the antibiotics, hormones, and supplements in commercially raised meats.
- You're conscious of your impact on this planet and want to make a positive change during your stay here.
- You like to think of creative ways to reuse empty containers, leftover building materials, broken furniture, and kitchen scraps.

INTRODUCTION: TO PLANT A SEED

- You're looking for a fun, natural hobby that you and your kids can participate in together, outdoors and away from electronic screens.
- You're tired of the basic row-by-row garden plan and wish there was a way to fit more abundance into your garden space.
- You want to make a positive change in your community.

Whether you checked off all these boxes or just one, you'll benefit from incorporating permaculture into your life.

So, maybe you've heard this buzzword "permaculture" and are excited to learn more about it. But it sure sounds like a lot to take in, especially if you're new to gardening. I felt the same way!

But pretty soon, you'll find that transforming your space into a permaculture paradise is easier than you thought! Of course, this is a journey of *many small steps*. The map is already there, etched into nature's code. This book is here to help you open that map, and take action, so you can start making your dream a reality, one step at a time.

We'll start by diving deeper into what permaculture is and the principles and goals behind it.

Then, you'll learn how to look at your space through permaculturist eyes and explore all the possibilities open to you, whether you have dozens of acres or just a few square feet.

And hey, if you can't tell the difference between a perennial and a porcupine, you're in luck! We will be going over all the gardening basics from a permaculture point of view.

Don't worry, you won't be going it alone. I'm here to guide you, and together, we'll be following blueprints that have stood the test of time. After all, the Earth's been spinning and food's been growing naturally for a long while now, right? The answers are out there. All we have to do is look with fresh eyes.

But before we get started, I want you to open your mind to these four simple principles:

#1: YOU'VE GOT THE RIGHT STUFF.

Throw those limiting misconceptions out, friend! Skip the recycling bin on this one. Permaculture and gardening ain't just for the professionals, farmers, rich

folks, and people with vast expanses of acreage. It's for everyone! *Yes, this includes you.* Say it with me, with a big ol' cheesy grin ... "I've got what it takes!" Feel goofy? Good. Embrace the goof.

Look, any time we try something new, thoughts and feelings of self-doubt are common for anyone to experience. In fact, the presence of doubt is a *great sign you are stretching beyond your comfort zone.* It means you're growing!

With this perspective shift, we can recognize the doubts for what they are when they do pop up. They are simply this — *thoughts and feelings* — and nothing more. They're *not the truth*, but defense mechanisms against the "unknown" that everyone else goes through, too. I've felt doubt plenty of times! Recognize all this as you feel it, and let it pass right on through. Thanks for trying to protect me, doubts. But I'm working with new information now.

You gain *confidence* through *knowledge* and *experience*. Sometimes just *knowing* how something works can demystify those daunting "unknowns." And *experience* gained through simple, consistent action builds competence. By reading this book and taking action from what you learn, you'll gain both *knowledge* and *experience!*

#2: DEVELOP A GROWTH MINDSET.

Alright, let's talk about that nasty F-word. Yep, you're going to *fail*. Ouch! I know, it stings. But, happily, it's true. And it's okay. *And, it's useful!* Failure = feedback! When dealing with the natural world — a world that is often outside of your control — failure happens, and again, it happens to everyone. You're not alone.

The key here is context. Consider the words of Janet Kilburn Phillips:

“ There are no gardening mistakes, only experiments.

Let's really let that sink in. What if there are no "failures" here, only experiments and lessons? Experience is the best teacher, and each "mistake" provides valuable feedback. Consider your gardening journey to be one big learning experience! So, if spittlebugs decimate your first crop of strawberries, embrace it, learn from it, and move forward, Champ. Permaculture is all about trial and error. And *if you stay the course*, what doesn't kill your garden only makes it stronger.

#3: WORK WITH WHAT YOU'VE GOT.

Embrace your space! If you find yourself up against a mental block that sounds like, “Aw, I wish I had land so I could *really* do this,” do yourself a big favor now and shift your perspective. Flip that thought to a positive: “*Look at all this space I have* right here on my 4’ x 6’ balcony!” See? Much better.

This journey is built on *seeing potential everywhere*. There’s a space for everyone in permaculture, no matter how big or small.

#4: TAKE YOUR TIME AND ENJOY THE RIDE!

In permaculture, we practice small, slow solutions. Although there are things you can do to start producing today, a permaculture garden doesn’t happen overnight. It takes years to establish, and it’s constantly developing. And that’s part of the fun! You can spend the rest of your life perfecting your permaculture plan.

For now, focus on baby steps. Something as small as planting a single seed will multiply in time.

Just like my collards did. And just like these great ideas have in my life, and I believe they will in yours too.



There are many ways you can use this book. You could pick a topic from the table of contents and use it for a reference as needed. Or you could read it from start to finish.

The ideas do build on each other, like the layers of a tasty cake. The first three chapters explore permaculture from the 30,000-foot-view. And while I believe the *mindsets* of permaculture lay an important foundation for its *practical application*, you may want to skip past theory and principles, and get right into the “how to” of your garden. I totally get it. If that’s you, I’d suggest jumping in at Chapter 4, where we’ll apply those core principles as we look at *your* space, and begin building your dream garden.

If you’re looking to reference a certain method or idea, this book is divided into five main parts:

INTRODUCTION: TO PLANT A SEED

1. **SEEING THROUGH A NEW LENS:** This is the foundation I talked about above. We'll dive into the core concepts of permaculture, and really hear its heartbeat. We'll get motivated and look at what makes a permaculture garden so powerful and exciting. We'll learn to see with new eyes, and how to apply the principles of permaculture, not just to gardening in general, but to your specific space, design, and journey.
2. **METHODS AND MATERIALS:** This part will really pack your tool belt. We'll cover a large scope of gardening methods you can use to carry out your design. From containers and raised beds, to different ways to prepare the ground. We'll also cover a variety of materials you can use to build not only your garden structures but the soil as well. Whatever your budget, skill level, or space, you'll have what you need to build a garden!
3. **PLANTING THE GARDEN:** This part will empower you with all you need to do the main thing: plant stuff! We'll learn all about your soil, how to check it and give it what it needs to optimize it for plant growth. We'll cover the details of growing plants, from starting seeds to transplanting, seeing them all the way through their life cycle. I'll help you decide what to plant, when to plant it, and where. We'll explore some advanced planting techniques to help you create a balanced, full garden and get the most out of it.
4. **EXPANDING THE DESIGN:** This is where your design really becomes enriched, integrated, and complete. From incorporating animal life to making use of the resources that are all around you, we'll take steps to creating a thriving mini-ecosystem. We'll harness natural resources, like rain, sun, and wind, to help your garden thrive. We'll learn the art of composting, and make powerful use of garden waste, food scraps, and even weeds, so everything serves a purpose.
5. **THINKING AHEAD:** This is where you pack your bags for the years ahead, so you are thoroughly equipped for this journey. We'll cover how to harvest your crops, as well as various methods of preserving food and extending the growing season for year-round abundance. We'll also brainstorm and troubleshoot, covering common garden issues from a permaculture perspective.

Maybe you're new to permaculture, or maybe you're already familiar with its concepts. Maybe you've already discovered your green thumb, or maybe you're wondering if you're even capable of growing a single bean. (Hint: You are! Do we need to do another goofy pep-talk?)

INTRODUCTION: TO PLANT A SEED

Wherever you're at, *I believe there's something in these pages for you.* As you read through the ideas inside, remember the power of the seed being planted. With dedication and nurturing, a seed brings incredible rewards.

Dr. Seuss may have been writing children's books, but he was really onto something when he wrote about the power of a single seed:

“ Plant the seed in the middle of town, where everyone can see. Change the way things are. I know it may seem small and insignificant, but it's not about what it is, it's about what it can become.

— DR. SEUSS, *THE LORAX*

A seed becomes a plant, which leads to more seeds, which leads to more plants. And eventually ... it becomes a forest.

In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, “*Thought is the seed of action.*”

As thoughts become actions, with consistency, it all builds up to an *abundant* and *satisfying harvest*. That's the circle of life, friend! Multiplication. Abundance. So on and so forth.

So. Are you ready? Let's plant the seed.

PART I

SEEING THROUGH A NEW LENS

THE MINDSET OF A PERMACULTURIST

Quick! Answer this question:
What do a Pawnee tribesman, your great-grandmother, and the guy who picks up your recycling all have in common?

(It's a tough one, I know).

Answer: They're all people who have practiced permaculture, whether they knew it or not. In some way, each one has worked with the land to survive, thrive, and make the Earth, and their community, a better place.

WHAT EXACTLY IS PERMACULTURE?

So what is permaculture? It sounds like a fancy technical term that belongs to landscape architects and environmental scientists. But for the rest of us, **permaculture** simply means *humans and nature working together in harmony*.

It's the idea of creating a self-sustaining agricultural ecosystem that follows nature's blueprint and can benefit the entire community. This idea has truly been around since the beginning of humanity. Pocahontas even sings about it in her musical debut.

Since the first civilization began in Mesopotamia, people have found ways to work with nature in a symbiotic relationship. It's an "I'll scratch your back, you

scratch mine” kind of thing: utilizing the land to your benefit and giving back by improving it in the process.

As Pocahontas so sagely expresses, it ain’t about owning the land like some dead thing, but realizing the Earth is brimming with life, and working in a *partnership* with it. Which just so happens to be one of the ethics behind permaculture. Way to go, Po.

INTRODUCING THE GREAT BILL MOLLISON!

Although the ideas behind permaculture have been around forever, the word “permaculture” hasn’t. It’s a mashup of the terms “permanent” and “agriculture.” It was coined by a man named Bill Mollison in the 1970’s. A native to Tasmania, Bruce Charles “Bill” Mollison spent the early part of his life in the bush and at sea, hunting, fishing, doing odd jobs, and researching the natural world around him.

Mollison later received his degree in biology from the University of Tasmania. He stayed on to lecture and teach, founding the university’s Environmental Psychology unit. It wasn’t until after he put his teaching hat aside that he pursued his lifelong passion for permaculture.

The idea had actually come to him years before. While observing marsupials browsing among the trees in the Tasmanian rainforest, he was inspired by the amazingly sustainable inner workings of the natural ecosystem.

Remember how planting a seed can mean an idea that starts a new journey? Well, this was that “seed” moment for Bill. That seed began to germinate, and one day he thought to himself and scribbled in his journal, “*I believe that we could build systems that would function as well as this one does.*” (Hemenway, 2009).

And that’s precisely what he did.

Drawing upon his own observations and some tried-and-true industrial-agricultural methods, Mollison spent the next 30 years as a scientist, teacher, and campaigner for permaculture.

And my, how the seed has grown.

PERMACULTURE DEFINED (WHEW!)

Mollison defines permaculture as:

“ ... a philosophy of working with, rather than against nature; of protracted and thoughtful observation rather than protracted and thoughtless labor; and of looking at plants and animals in all their functions, rather than treating any area as a single product system.

In his first book, *Introduction to Permaculture* (Mollison & Slay, 1991), Bill explains that permaculture aims

“ ... to create systems that are ecologically sound and economically viable, which provide for their own needs, do not exploit or pollute, and are therefore sustainable in the long term. Permaculture uses the inherent qualities of plants and animals combined with the natural characteristics of landscapes and structures to produce a life-supporting system for city and country, using the smallest practical area.

Thanks, Bill! Well put! But, um ... what the heck does that mean?

To understand what Mr. Mollison was trying to tell us, it might be helpful to break his words down into small, digestible chunks that we can all understand.

To go about that, let's open our eyes and ears ... to *see the picture* of permaculture at work, and *hear the heartbeat* of its greater mission.

First, we'll follow in the footsteps of our fearless leader, Bill, and take a little stroll through the woods.

SEE THE PICTURE: A WALK IN THE WOODS

Think of the forest.

Nobody tills the land. Nobody sows seeds. Nobody waters the plants or pulls out the weeds. Nobody fertilizes the soil. Yet, the forest thrives and feeds and shelters its residents.

No waste comes out of the forest. That's because everything here is a resource. The leaves that drop from the trees decompose on the forest floor and feed the soil.

Plants flower, set seed, and die back. Winds or birds pick up the seeds and scatter them throughout the forest.

Nobody here sprays insecticides to kill pests. The birds do the job by pecking at and wolfing them down. Somehow, it's like every living thing works together and has its place, and there is this ... beautiful balance.

Look around (the forest, that is). Can you see it? All the lush, vibrant, and *abundant* vegetation? Can you feel the crunch of leaves decomposing beneath your feet? Hear all the wildlife chiming in like a grand symphony?

That's the sound of life, baby. An ecosystem at work, and fully taking care of itself. The great circle of life. (Also movie musical reference number 2).

The cycle is complete, yet no human "made" it that way. How can this be?

Well, call it what you want, but it *works*. In fact, it excels! This is nature at work and shining, like a fine-tuned, well-oiled machine.

Can you imagine having a micro-version of that *in your own garden*? What if a home garden could regenerate itself like this? That's the vision Bill saw.

Let's take a page out of nature's playbook. Or heck, just read the book!

Masanobu Fukuoka was a famous Japanese farmer celebrated for his natural farming, also called "do-nothing farming." He authored the highly influential book, *The One-Straw Revolution*, and is considered by many to be the Master Farmer of Japan. He was also a great inspiration to Bill Mollison. Masanobu said it like this:

“ Observe nature thoroughly rather than labor thoughtlessly.

Indeed. Permaculture's ideas for designing gardens are filled with the philosophy of "work smarter" not *unnecessarily* harder. Minimum input for the maximum output. Nature's been doing this gig for a while now, and as they say, "*If it ain't broke, don't fix it!*"

Now that we're catching a vision of permaculture at work for food-growing purposes, let's listen to the heartbeat of why it's important in the big picture.

HEAR THE HEARTBEAT: PERMACULTURE'S 3 CORE VALUES

This is the “why” of permaculture — what kept Bill up at night. You can break down the mission of permaculture into three core values, which are:

1. **EARTH CARE:** Treating the Earth with a sense of responsibility and stewardship,
2. **PEOPLE CARE:** Responding to the needs of ourselves and those in our community, and
3. **SHARE THE SURPLUS:** Reinvesting our surplus into the above two so that it doesn't go to waste.

Check this out. If you've ever planted and grown a few seeds organically, harvested their yield, then given away some to your neighbor, you've practiced the three core values of permaculture. Look, you're a permaculturist, and didn't even know it!

EARTH CARE

Symbiosis is a major factor in permaculture. If you don't remember it from third-grade science class, it's a close relationship between two different kinds of organisms: a clownfish and an anemone, an oxpecker and a rhino, or man and nature.

More specifically, permaculture embodies a kind of **mutualism**. This is where two organisms work together to benefit one another. The oxpecker enjoys a free buffet of blood-sucking insects while the rhino gets personalized grooming services.

We as humans enjoy the fruits of the Earth. This includes literal fruits, vegetables, meat, and natural materials like firewood, lumber, and fibers. In return, we can give back, sowing into this Earth we've been given, by caring for its soil, optimizing our use of renewable resources, reducing waste, and leaving things better than we found them.

And hang on, before you tune out another voice shouting from a soapbox, this is also a pretty smart investment. Look at it this way. All the essentials that keep us alive — air, water, food, shelter — are all sourced from ... you guessed it. There's no Planet B, am I right?

And permaculture comes in with *good news!* We can *work together*. The Earth is ready and willing to give back abundantly to us, and clues have been left for us on how to maximize our stay here while also making a positive impact during it. And that's good for the Earth *and* for us. See, symbiosis! And if we learn our part in the dance with nature, there are a ton of benefits we *all* reap.

Permaculture is a carefully balanced choreography of *natural ecosystems* and *human-designed systems* aimed at *food production*. It embraces natural and sustainable agricultural methods, renewable energy and resources, and the biodiversity found in nature.

In short, live in harmony with nature, and everyone comes out on top. This means cleaner, tastier tomatoes for you, and healthier soil and life for the Earth. Teamwork makes the dream work.

PEOPLE CARE

“People care” is why many would-be permaculturists are fascinated with the system. The ultimate goal of many is to sustain yourself and your family for an entire year on fresh, organic products you've harvested at home.

And for many people, the goal is also to eliminate dependence on the grocery store or food supply chain. With ever-climbing food prices and sometimes questionable commercial farming practices, many see a homegrown strawberry or salad as the Holy Grail.

A permaculturist lifestyle can also provide water, shelter, and overall sustainability. Incorporating these ideas into your home can better prepare you and your family in the case of a catastrophic event (when the you-know-what “hits the fan”, as doomsday preppers like to call it). These are all fantastic goals.

But can you hear that heartbeat singin', “*zoom out a little*”? In fact, the idea of total “self-sufficiency” may well be a myth. After all, we all need each other to survive and thrive! We are not unlike that fine-tuned forest ecosystem, each with our unique part to play. Someone else made the computer I used to type up this book, after all.

In fact, remember how the word “permaculture” is a mashup of “permanent” and “agriculture”? Well, over time the word also developed the meaning of “permanent *culture*” and incorporated social aspects. Mutualism on a whole nutha level.

Yessir, permaculture extends beyond the walls of our own off-grid cabins and into the greater community around us. This can be your neighbors, friends, extended family, and community members. No man is an island. Even that crazy hermit guy who lives in a shack at the edge of town is part of this “human ecosystem”. And hey, maybe he’d like some strawberries too.

Permaculturists believe that taking care of the Earth is just as important as taking care of the people who live on it. They believe in everyone having opportunities to feel secure, satisfied, and sustained. They work toward the goal of everyone’s basic human needs being met. They’re just plain good neighbors.

Just ask great-grandma. Back in the day, one neighbor might have grown corn, another might have raised pigs, and another might have made homemade soap. Rather than let the extra go to waste, each neighbor would share what they had so that everyone got a little of each.

No corn rotted away in the silo, and no fresh pork spoiled in the summer heat. That’s a fine real-life example of the *people care* ethic, and also a great example of the next one.

SHARING THE SURPLUS

The core value of sharing surplus is all about taking only what we need and reinvesting the rest. In a world increasingly overrun with waste, permaculturists are all about moving excess resources back into the *earth* or the *community*. This could mean composting yard waste and food scraps, donating surplus crops to a food bank, or contributing to an accessible community garden.

The third ethic extends from the first two. The complete heart of these ethics is, as Bill Mollison puts it, “*care of the earth, care of people, and reinvestment in those ends.*”

Now, while some permaculture purists would rather focus solely on giving away the excess (which is noble!), it’s worth noting that for others with an entrepreneurial spirit (which is also awesome!), selling excess produce at a local farmer’s market can really benefit the community as well.

It boosts the local economy, promotes community interconnectedness, provides fresh organic food to the community, spreads awareness to more people about permaculture, and helps fund the future growth of your garden, which will then help more people. So on and so forth! There’s nothing saying you can’t set up a

fine stand at the market or even build a thriving business, all while cultivating generosity simultaneously. In fact, they can build on each other beautifully.

As you go digging through permaculture literature, you'll find that the community of permaculture is just as diverse as its gardens. Permaculture values diversity, and it is inclusive! And so, this third ethic has been the topic of a lot of discussions that extend far beyond the scope of this book. Some people call this ethic "fair share" (which rhymes nicely with the other two), and some have suggested that it be rebranded to "future care" ... and there are a lot of different beliefs and reasons behind all that.

Whichever way you lean in your unique beliefs, there's a basic heartbeat to embrace within this third ethic.

Permaculture is centered on the inherent abundance, generosity, and reciprocity written in the Earth's DNA, and this ethic is all about moving in that flow. It's less about some rule or law, and more about cultivating awareness, responsibility, gratitude, teamwork, legacy, long-term thinking, hope, and a heart of "giving back." At the risk of turning this chapter into a movie musical "Greatest Hits" album here, let's put it this way: *we're all in this together*.

So as we grow and as we consume food, permaculture invites us to consider the needs of both present and future generations. Without a doubt, there's plenty of cause for concern about our future, and our resources.

But where some voices seem to paint a hopelessly bleak outlook, or sound kinda heavy-handed or doomy-and-gloomy; I see permaculture looking once again into the wells of nature's abundance and drawing out great optimism. Maybe that's my unique perspective and I sound a little like Pollyanna Permaculture ... but it's what I see!



No gardener would be a gardener if he did not live in hope.

— VITA SACKVILLE-WEST

And lemme tell ya, I caught the vision from permaculture's finest. 'Twas the people of permaculture who taught me the power packed within a single seed! Remember? If we keep in mind the principle of multiplication over time, we see how there are entire forests inside of that one tiny seed. One of the world's leading permaculturists put it this way:

“ Permaculture gives us a toolkit for moving from a culture of fear and scarcity to one of love and abundance.

— TOBY HEMENWAY

Yes! Nature’s message is not one of scarcity, but *abundance* that we can all tap into! And indeed, there are *many* ways to share the love.

On that note, this tenant of permaculture embraces the pass-it-on principle. One fun idea is to organize a community produce swap, where local gardeners can swap their surplus and enjoy variety. You can also share your spare seeds with a neighbor or strawberries with a hermit. You can distribute excess produce to the community, throw a berry-preserving party with your friends, or teach a child about permaculture. Knowledge is a great resource to distribute, and I’ll bet you have a surplus building!

Helping others to achieve sustainability makes the world a better place. And it makes Bill Mollison smile.

SEEING THE WORLD THROUGH PERMIE GLASSES

Are you a permie? Not to be confused with babies born before their due dates, **permies** are people who are *totally into permaculture*. Whether you’re a first-time infant permie (a premie permie?) or a professionally certified card-carrying permaculturist, everyone has a place in the permaculture world.

That’s because permaculture doesn’t have to be an all-or-nothing, sign-your-name-here kind of thing. Like the natural world, it’s organic, flexible, and adaptable to your unique situation.

If you take only one thing away from this chapter, I hope it’s this: *permaculture is not a set of rules. Instead, it’s a way of thinking*. It’s viewing the world through a different lens. It’s part curiosity, part resolve, and a willingness to live harmoniously with the planet and your fellow creatures.

You may be thinking, “Get me to the part where I’m feeding my own home-grown tomatoes to my family and friends!” Rest assured, we will get there. But truly, the mindsets in permaculture are the foundation on which the rest of its design principles are built. And if you can learn to see more possibilities in your daily life, you can learn to see more possibilities in your garden.

As you see how you can reuse daily items, for instance, you start to see how you can reuse your fallen trees. Your eyes open to multiple uses everywhere. You start to see how you may not need all this extra external input you thought you needed. Perhaps there's a lot more potential right in front of you than you realized.

We learn about gardening from life. And we learn about life from gardening.

... That was fortune-cookie-worthy right there.

As you try on permie glasses, remember, you don't have to transition to some new lifestyle all at once. Baby steps are perfectly great, especially if you're a permie premie. Start with thinking about little ways you can practice awareness in your daily life.

- Instead of thinking, "Where will I get my food?" ... put on your new permie glasses and ask, "What kind of food can I grow myself?" Growing food — no matter how little — is good for you, good for the planet, and 100% doable. Learn to see potential all around you (and within you)!
- Instead of thinking, "How much stuff can I buy?" ... embrace the joy of simplifying! Try to reduce the new things you buy and focus on quality rather than toss-it-and-replace-it items. Minimalism isn't just on trend, it's also super relieving to the mind.
- Start asking, "What resources do I already have all around me?" Repurpose the waste that you can and recycle the waste that you can't. For example, reuse grocery bags or donate old clothes to a thrift store. And those food scraps? Punch a few holes in the top of a \$7 plastic tub from Walmart and dump kitchen waste and shredded paper into it. Pretty soon, you'll have your own "black gold" to feed your plants! (More on this in Chapter 13).
- Instead of thinking, "I don't have the time to save the world!" (How true) ... Think, "How can I get involved?" You don't have to start a nonprofit organization or even volunteer at the local soup kitchen to get involved with your community. Visiting a farmers market, shopping locally, or donating to a community initiative are all fun, fulfilling ways to contribute that don't take much time. Reach out to the community to share resources and ideas.

There are so many things you can start incorporating now — and have fun trying on — as you continue living your life. This isn't about some radical overnight

overhaul. You don't have to cancel your Netflix subscription to get started growing your own tomatoes.

Will you find permaculture purists who say you should convert your home to solar and cut ties with your municipal waste facility? Sure, and more power to them (literally!). But not everyone can be that person. I certainly am not. Going in whole-hog can be overwhelming, especially when you love the creature comforts that modernity has blessed us with.

Not to mention, a complete lifestyle change is often unrealistic, due to limits in resources or time, dietary considerations, and other important factors.

Here comes permaculture once again to reassure us that it's all about "small and slow solutions," and working with what you have! Right here and now. So relax, breathe in the fresh air, and take the next step you can.

Then hey, who knows? Maybe someday, you'll be installing those solar panels on your roof as you look upon your backyard Eden, brimming with life. You'll think fondly back to these first steps, smile, and say to yourself, "My my, how far we've come."

For now, take the step you can ... and take the next step that *excites* you, because this journey is definitely about having fun, too.

WRAP-UP

Okay Josie, I've got a basic feel for the permaculture vibe. Check. I get that being a permie means looking at things differently. Check. We took a cool field trip through the forest, and we heard Papa Mollison's heartbeat and all about the mission, double check. So ...

What does this have to do with gardening?

I'm glad you asked. Follow me to the next chapter, where we'll explore the power of a permaculture garden.