Permanent Culture - Beyond Sustainable

Carey Thornton, Garden Educator

Nature is abundant. Nature is resourceful. Nature is resilient. These are all qualities that we seek in our lives, our homes, and our gardens. So how do we get there? One place to look is permaculture.

Permaculture. The name is a contraction of the words “permanent culture.” It’s a design philosophy that seeks to mimic and incorporate natural systems into human made environments. Bill Mollison, one of the originators of permaculture, describes it 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.”

Permacultural principles, such as encouraging diversity, catching and storing energy, and using relative location to take advantage of the connections between elements, apply to any designed system. In his book “Gaia’s Garden: A Guide to Home-Scale Permaculture,” Toby Hemenway says “Permaculture has been used to design buildings, wastewater systems, villages, and even less tangible things such as school curricula, businesses, community groups, and decision-making processes.”

Nature integrates rather than segregates. Her ecosystems are made of whole communities of plants and animals. Nature is efficient -- we see her recycle all waste. Nature is resilient, using multiple elements to support every function. Permaculture goes beyond the goal of “sustainability” to that of “abundance.” It is about changing our culture from one of consumption to one of production. The focus is to reverse our current model of degeneration to one of regeneration.

If you are interested in learning more about permaculture, consider taking a class at Seattle Tilth. We will be offering our fourth Permaculture Design Certification course taught by Toby Hemenway this winter. Unlike most design courses that occur as two-week intensives, this course will take place one weekend a month from October 2012 through March 2013, offering flexibility for people with busy schedules.

Already turned on to the benefits of permaculture and want to spread the word? Maybe you’d like to learn how teach others what you have discovered. Seattle Tilth is offering a Permaculture Teacher Training Course in September. This exciting week-long intensive course will be offered at the Seattle Tilth Farm Works farm in Auburn, WA. Rarely offered in the US, this course will be residential and include farm fresh meals.

Permaculture Design Certification Course
October 12-March 8,
2nd weekend each month in Seattle.

Permaculture Teacher Training
September 8-14 at the
Seattle Tilth Farm Works farm in Auburn.

Find out more about these classes and others at http://seattletilth.org/learn/classes-and-workshops/sustainablelandscapclasses.