

10 WAYS TO REINVENT YOUR GARDEN WITH PERMACULTURE



Practical Ways to Start Following Permaculture Principles in Your Garden

So, you've taken an interest in permaculture and have decided to start growing your own self sustainable garden – congratulations. You have discovered a way to become part of the solution to the world's ills rather than part of the problem. Perhaps you have read about the theory of permaculture and thought about the principles of permaculture garden design but need a little help to turn ideas into practical action? Here is a brief practical guide for beginners to help show you how you can begin to implement permaculture in your garden:

Stage One: Creating Your Growing Space

Step 1: Permaculture Garden Bed Design

Permaculture teaches us that a 'no dig' approach is best and that the soil ecosystem should be disturbed as little as possible. But how should we go about actually creating growing space without disturbing the soil? Raised beds are an answer. The edges of beds or containers can be made from whatever you have around: wood, stone, glass bottles stuck into the ground, reclaimed bricks etc. – creativity is key. You can then create a growing medium by layering cardboard, paper or sticks and twigs with green garden waste and scraps from your kitchen. Alternatively, you can use straw as a primary growing medium or create mounds for hugelkultur filled with rotting logs. Put a layer of compost on top in which to plant your vegetables. All this allows the ecosystem in your garden's topsoil to thrive.



Step 2: Herb Spirals

Edges are the most productive part of any ecosystem. Permaculture beds make the most of the 'edge effect' by maximising the amount of edge available. Spiral beds for herbs are one popular permaculture garden project. The spiral can be created, again, using whatever is (legally) available in your area. It will maximise the amount of edge for growing and also provide conditions suitable for lots of herbs in a relatively small space.

Step 3: Vertical/Small Space Gardening

If space is limited, permaculture advocates doing what we can to increase yields. This is where creativity once again comes to play. Amazing vertical gardens can be created, for instance, by simply stapling horticultural fabric in pockets to the back of an old wooden pallet; filling those pockets with soil; planting it full with herbs, strawberries and salad crops and placing the structure against a wall or fence. Plastic food or drink cartons strung from a frame of reclaimed materials are another easy and cheap way to create a vertical garden.

Stage Two: Increasing Biodiversity



Step 4: Forest Gardening

Another thing to bear in mind when planting your garden is that you are aiming to work with nature to increase not only yield, but also the variety of plants and animals there. Biodiversity is good. One of the most biodiverse and successful ecosystems on the planet is forest. By mimicking a natural forest in your garden, you can create a healthier, more productive and more resilient system. Plant trees, plant shrubs beneath them, and smaller plants below those and ground cover just above the soil, perhaps allow vines to twine throughout. Layering allows you to have more plants in a smaller space and each layer can help the ones above or beneath it, so the whole garden works well together. How's that for team work?

Step 5: Habitat and Home Creation

When planning what to put in your garden and what to plant, you should think about all the wildlife that shares your space. Taking care of pollinating insects, keeping the balance between pests and predators, and ensuring good biodiversity, are all processes which, in the long run, will make life easier for yourself as an organic gardener.

Four great ideas to start with could be:

- Make a pond.
- Care for native birds with planting feeders and nesting boxes.
- Leave brush and wilderness zones for passing mammals.
- Create a bee and bug hotel.

Stage Three: Managing and Conserving Water

Step 6: Harvesting Rainwater

Collect rain when it falls for use when it is dry. Connect water butts or any large, covered containers to the down pipes on the guttering of your home, garage and/or shed to make the most of all the rain falling on your property.

Step 7: Swales and Irrigation

Creating swales, or ditches can help direct water to where it is needed. Clay pot irrigation (literally placing clay pots in the soil with plants around, into which water can be poured and through which it will be released as needed) is a good solution to save water, especially in drier climates.



Stage Four: Caring For the Soil, Dealing With 'Waste'



Step 8: Composting

The cliché 'you are what you eat' counts not only for you, but for your garden too. A healthy garden needs a healthy food source. Hence why, in an organic garden and especially in a 'no dig' system, nothing is more important than creating your own good-quality compost. A good composting system means that nothing is wasted and you will return nutrients to your soil, helping to make sure that the soil ecosystem remains in good shape or is improved.

Making compost can be as simple as starting a heap in the corner of your garden. You can simply pile up compost in a bin, or heap, adding it in thin layers of 'brown' (carbon rich materials such as wood chips; twigs; cardboard) and 'green' (nitrogen rich materials like grass; green leaves; vegetable scraps from your kitchen). You can make a bin to contain your compost by nailing together old wooden pallets or other scrap wood. Scrap wood can also be used to make a wormery in which worms can help you create compost.

Step 9: Mulching and Organic Feeds

In an organic garden, nothing goes to waste, not even the weeds. Weeds contain valuable nutrients too, but putting some in your compost heap could cause them to spread. Solution? Instead, place weeds in a bucket of water, weighing them down with some object so they all lie beneath the water's surface. A few days later, drain out some of the fluid and you will have a general purpose plant feed. Using the same method, you can use comfrey for a great tomato feed and nettles to make a feed for nitrogen loving leafy plants.

Step 10: Uses for Other Waste in Your Garden

It is not only kitchen scraps that can be recycled in the garden. You can also give other household waste a second life, not only to create the edges of raised beds or vertical gardens but also cloches, seed trays, planters and more. You can even make a whole greenhouse using plastic drinks bottles. The uses for waste in your garden are limited only by your imagination.



This list only scratches the surface when it comes to all the amazing things you will be able to create and achieve in your organic, permaculture garden but it should give you a good place to start. Living in harmony with nature, we don't necessarily need all sorts of expensive gear to enrich our lives; all we have to do is observe how she functions, and let whatever tools and creativity we have at our disposal lead the way. As with all things in life – over time, we learn; over time, we improve. But the only way to get there is to start.

About the Author

Meet Elizabeth Waddington

Elizabeth is a writer, passionate about getting the word out there about permaculture and what can be done to live more sustainably. She and her husband own a lush, green property in rural Fife, Scotland. This is where they experiment with various permaculture solutions, including a polytunnel, vegetable beds, a herb spiral, a wildlife pond, a mushroom patch, and a walled orchard where they keep chickens for eggs. In turn, she happily shares her gardening knowledge and experience on blogs for you to learn from.

