

Permaculture Questions with Answers by Roz Brown

Q. In your opinion is Permaculture likely to be a mainstream or a marginal response to the problems associated with Peak Oil and Climate Change?

A. Through the Transition Towns Movement, many more people are becoming aware of the future problems we are likely to face, especially in relation to locally produced food imperatives. The Transition movement came out of Permaculture and is embodied in it, so I would say it will be substantially more than a marginal response. Transition and Permaculture are also global initiatives, and even in places like India, communities are becoming aware that cutting food miles by growing more local food is a vital part of both tackling climate change and carbon emissions, and preparing for escalating local needs as fuel stocks decline and prices rise.

Q. Are the principles and philosophies, or the practices of Permaculture more useful in obtaining an ideally zero carbon future?

A. All three are needed to effect change in our society. The ethics and principles of Permaculture are fundamental to making the practices work in society.

Q. What would be the major societal/dietary changes if Permaculture became a mainstream response?

A. There would be a fairer distribution of resources. People would have access to fresher, healthier food. There would be a recognition of individual and national responsibility for equity and correct husbandry of resources.

Q. What is the yield like compared to current commercial/local agriculture?

A. Yields are not dissimilar to organic farming. However, if we look towards growing different kinds of crops in a different way - ie using the forest garden model, we can produce more food per acre because we are making use of vertical as well as horizontal growing spaces, and creating self sustaining plant communities that require low input for high output,, and need no extra fertiliser from outside.

Q. What will be the main advantages and disadvantages of embracing Permaculture?

A. I don't personally see any disadvantages. Permaculture is likely to increase quality of life and of food in a future where these things will suffer because of climate change and fossil fuel decline. It has already been pointed out that if everyone on earth lived like the Americans, we would need 8 planets. That is clearly not sustainable, so things will inevitably get worse if we go on as at present.

Q. Can Permaculture provide us anything aside from food?

A. Permaculture can provide whatever we design into the system, as it applies to culture, community and business systems just as much as food and plant materials production.

Q. How long does it take for a farm adopting Permaculture to reach maturity and produce the maximum yield?

A. That depends on the crop. If you are planting a forest garden, you can expect fruit and nut bearing plants to take the same time to establish fully as in any other orchard system. However, planting these trees and bushes will create micro-climates that enable other plants like perennial vegetables to thrive, so there can be very quick benefits alongside the establishment of a forest garden. Soil health may take a while to build up if you are starting with an impoverished or neglected piece of land. Since we don't rely on artificial fertilisers for a quick fix, it may take a lot of preparation time to get the soil really productive, but the results will be better and enduring, and without relying on oil based fertiliser or dwindling world stocks of potash.

Q. What, if anything, are the basic requirements to be successful with Permaculture? Are any regions of the world not able to adopt Permaculture?

A. The basic requirement is the ability to see the problem as the solution. Different regions require different approaches. There is work being done all over the world to apply Permaculture design principles to both the tropics and the arid regions of the planet. Permaculture has been successfully applied in the high mountains of Nepal, and saved Cuba from crisis. The basis is always to look at Nature, and develop systems that emulate what happens all by itself.

It is interesting to note that the developing discipline known as Biomimicry is also taking its cue from nature in developing technologies for the future that emulate natural systems in plants and animals.

Answers originally given by Roz Brown to a PhD student looking at comparative future agricultural systems. The interview formed part of the final dissertation.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.