

Permaculture ethics and how they apply to my project

### **Care for the Earth**

We care for the Earth in many ways and she cares for us in every way.

We are the tenants of this small spot on the planet and we do our best to manifest a strong, diverse, healthy system for ourselves and all the other billions of creatures living here.

- Regenerating the soil - by hauling in lots of organic material, manure, sea weed, leaves etc. Leaving the soil alone, mulching, planting trees, bushes, mulch plants, nitrogen fixers, accumulator plants, increasing biodiversity wherever possible.
- We aim to be as self sufficient as possible.
- We work in many different ways to be the change we wish to see, to share information about alternative energy, growing food, thinking solutions and making choices.
- We do not consume industrially produced meat and dairy
- If we need anything we try to find it second hand, build it ourselves or borrow whenever possible
- We heat our house with renewable energy and generate our own electricity
- We have changed our cars from gasoline to diesel now running 20-22 km per liter
- We have invested in electrical bikes to reduce our fossil fuel mileage – with great success and wind in our hair :o)

All of this is not perfect of course, but these are some of the choices that have been possible for us – it is a work in progress to become a contributing factor in the health of the planet instead of a liability. We care deeply about this.

### **Care for people**

The space and the processes offered in The Inspiratorium very much grew out of a desire to help people connect with their true nature – once we are connected to that we are much more able to make our lives works of joy, love, creativity and abundance for ourselves and others.

We want to show simple, real and accessible solutions to a meaningful and connected life – “for the benefit of all beings including ourselves” – as the Buddhists say :o)

Being deep inside nature also helps most people to connect to their inner being and the feedback we get is that the space itself feels immensely supporting for that process and is in itself inspiring change when people go back to their everyday lives.

There are 3 ways to teach (or inspire change):

By example

By example

By example

## **Share the surplus**

The Inspiratorium is made for people, plants, insects, birds, animals, soil creatures etc. and all should thrive in this natural abundance. It would make no sense if it is not shared.

We share insights, knowledge, time, love, inspiration, produce, plants and many other things. We do that with everything that is already here, everyone that visits the place, with our family and neighbors and with all the connections we have with the other islanders. There is a great network of sharing here and most often people leave with a bag full of fruits, plants, seed or inspiration – and very often that is what we return with when we have been visiting someone.

Everything is beautifully connected.

## **Permaculture principles and how they apply to my project**

### **1) Observe**

I think observation was what set this investigation of an alternative life in motion. Observing our inner state, observing the quality of our relationships and the way we spent our time and energy – and seeing/sensing what worked and what didn't made us make changes that brought us more in sync with the natural flow of life.

Having moved from Copenhagen to a small island an intense reconnection to nature took place. More and more we were becoming aware of the state of fields surrounding our farm, how they dried and cracked in hot summers and how hardly any decomposition took place if a pile of organic material was lying around and how dense and heavy the soil felt. I even tried to dig a hole in our garden and count the earth worms and do the same on one of the fields and found that there was only about ¼ of what I found in the garden soil and that they were much smaller in general.

Very often when we observe we know instinctively what is going on – like a sensing, a flow of information that moves through us when we are really present. And we always feel it when something is not in balance - if we listen it will tell us to examine what is going on more closely and make the appropriate changes.

Meditation is a great way of training our ability to observe and listen deeply to ourselves and nature. I do it with joy every day – and often in the garden - and it helps me to stay within the flow of Everything. It also reveals connections, functions and relationships that I would otherwise be unaware of.

Deep and honest observation inside and outside is the foundation for any doing or-no-doing that is in congruence with the oneness of everything.

### **2) Catch and store energy**

Catching and storing energy is vital to any system. Surrounding us is a wonderful example of a system that has a very unbalanced relationship to energy – conventional farming :o) We are grateful for the inspiration it has provided to learn how to do things differently!

We need to learn to harvest the energy that enters or manifests on our plot. Sun, wind, water, materials etc. We are trying to create a system in balance that generates and stores all the energy it needs to thrive.

The design of the forest garden makes pockets of shelter and sun catchment to create beneficial microclimates. We have put up PV's to generate enough electricity to cover our needs both in the retreat centre and the private house – depending on the summer production and how much the centre is in use it balances pretty well.

We have dug out a deep pond in the forest garden to catch and store rainwater – both to boost insect life, watering and to grow produce (like arrowheads). Another function is to drain that part of the garden in very wet winters.

As the percentage of organic material grows in the soil (particularly in the forest garden that was conventionally farmed until 14 years ago) and the trees mature, we will be able to store more water in the soil and there will be less or no need for watering during the summer months.

We have also installed 1600 l of rainwater catchment barrels around by the gutters, this again reduces the need to use ground water to water the garden. When the roof of the big barn is changed (within some years) we plan to install a big underwater tank for rainwater catchment with a small pump that will allow us to control the water level in the pond and rely solely on rainwater for watering.

We have several different compost areas and worm bins to make sure that no useful resource leaves the property. Several big heaps of organic material, manure, twigs, branches etc. are left to decompose in 2 areas – it is perhaps a slow process, but it is very beneficial for insects, soil life, fungi etc. and it needs no other energy input.

We also have a more intensive compost in the vegetable garden, that is turned and managed. And we have two big worm composting bins where all the kitchen waste goes both from the retreat centre and the private house. We always instruct the groups in the centre how to separate waste and use the worm bins.

### **3) Obtain a yield**

It is important to get results/rewards for our work quickly - it gives us energy to continue manifesting.

We were fortunate to take over a mature, traditional farm house garden 15 years ago, so we have a lot of big fruit trees, nuts, berries and many edible perennials and wild plants on the plot. Nevertheless we have found it important to plant a lot of berry bushes, more perennial edibles and more fruit trees – different varieties – and many fast growing fruiting climbers along the fence to boost yields and to have as much as possible to share with the groups using our facilities.

A lot of the permaculture plants and fruits/berries are unknown to most people so a tasting tour in the garden can be a great adventure and inspiration for many.

### **4) Selfregulate – accept feedback**

We must constantly be willing to evaluate if what we are doing is in balance with everything, if there is a smarter way.....or perhaps if we need to do it at all.....

This principle (perhaps in particular) is for me very much connected with the first principle of observation – when we observe anything closely we are open to feedback and we are open to change what is not working (if at all possible). This also helps us learn as much as possible from our mistakes. This is the internal feedback loop :o)

We must also be open to feedback from whoever we come into contact with and we do get a lot of (positive) feedback from all the people connecting with The Inspiratorium. There are several kinds of feedback – the direct verbal kind, where we can exchange observations, ideas, point of views etc. and the non-verbal kind where we just observe how people react to and use The Inspiratorium – what works really well and what needs changing/tweaking/clarifying? This we could call the external feedback loop.

### **5) Use and value renewable**

Reducing our dependency on non-renewable or scarce resources is essential to create a healthy system. Ideally we should be able to create systems where we get abundant output for very little or no input other than natural renewable resources like water and sun energy....and perhaps a little pruning and weeding on top of the harvesting.

We use some fossil fuels to keep the lawn, but have invested in an electrical lawn mower to reduce that need as well as reducing the lawn-space that needs mowing in the first place. And as the forest garden ground cover matures we will be able to let it overflow into the other areas of the garden – less lawn, more edibles :o)

We really value the easy access we have to renewable organic resources here on Samsøe. Many people give away their horse, chicken and cow manure for free – we just have to pick it up, and the beaches are a great source of sea weed and drift wood for furniture making.

We also get organic waste from our neighbors – we are happy to have it and they don't have to go to the landfill with it – energy saved and harvested.

### **6) Produce no waste**

That's an ideal worth striving for! Nature produces no waste – everything is used and recycled, broken up and re-assembled again and again. Someone's waste product is someone else's fuel....we should be able to mimick that.

We work with this in many ways. In the way we recycle organic material in the garden through different composting systems. Recycling whatever we can – glass, cardboard, plastic, paper and recycling stuff, giving to charities and friends or up-cycling in creative ways.

We don't waste food.

We do produce waste – mainly packaging from food items. Here on the island we have only 2 supermarkets and they are not very alternative with regards to packaging. But we buy from local growers as much as we can to reduce waste and support the local community and we are also slowly but surely becoming more self sufficient, thereby reducing the need for packaging and our contribution to food mileage.

## **7) Design from pattern to detail**

Using natural patterns will enhance the healthy flow of energy in a system – and they are much more pleasing to the eye than straight lines and squares. Nature meanders and so should we in a permaculture garden.

We have used several patterns in our design – f. ex. the central spiral in the forest garden. It has a symbolic, a practical and a spiritual function in the design. The spiral is an ancient power symbol – like a galaxy – and it feels important to honor that power. It is practical because it allows us to make one trip to the forest garden to fill the salad bowl, not having to search every corner for a bit of this and a bit of that. It is also very practical to have most of the perennial edibles in one place when you are presenting the idea of that to visitors. We have designed the spiral without any crossing pathways on purpose – forcing everyone to go all the way to the centre and all the way back – just to counter the habit of our society to always try to get from A to B as fast as possible and making a trip to the spiral an opportunity for a sensual meditation.

Around the spiral are wavy patterns to maximize edge, create many pockets of microclimate and please the eye at the same time. All pathways are also wavy.

Another pattern used is that of veins in a leaf – we are using this pattern in designing the small paths between the bigger pathways. We are not deciding where they should be but will rather “allow” them to manifest as we observe how we move around in the forest garden – always with this pattern in mind. Once it begins to manifest we will perhaps enhance it with stepping stones and other things. This beautiful pattern is using the least space to get to all corners.

## **8) Integrate/connect**

Everything is relationship. Nothing can manifest outside the interconnectedness of all things.

The more different elements you have performing the same function and the more functions each element performs the stronger the web (of life) and the less vulnerable the system is, if affected by pests, disease, wind, flood, heat etc.

Discovering all the new permaculture plants and trees has been a wonderful journey, but even more so the discovery of plant communities – how everything works together and how we can work with that.

In the design we have made sure that there is enough nitrogen fixing plants and trees to feed the whole system and accumulating and mulch plants to boost soil health, plants attracting beneficial insects, plants repelling or confusing harmful insects etc. etc.

With every bush and tree planted we have inoculated the roots with mycorrhizia to speed up the growth and health of the system. In a healthy system it is the number of connections and the quality of those connections that matter.

This is an ongoing discovery – both in the old part of the garden and in the forest garden. It is very easy to see how much more interconnected everything is in the old garden and how the forest garden is still struggling to make more connections.

### **9) Use small, slow solutions**

It's not a good plan to start a project that is too big to handle – energy wise, financially, time wise. Starting in a corner and learning/building from there is the best way to go. It also gives you the opportunity to propagate a lot of the plants you need as that can be a serious cost in a permaculture project.

This principle is not so much in my nature – I usually go big – but I also usually finish what I start :o) Nevertheless the principle applies in many ways – especially regarding the implementation of the ground cover. We only cover part of the grass with plastic each year and plant the ground cover in autumn when we have made enough plants during the growth season. As the part that is already covered with ground crops grows we can expand more quickly as we have more plant material to take from.

Proceeding a little more slowly than I usually would also gives me more time to get to know all the new plant-beings and their requirements/favorite conditions.

And trees are notoriously slow growing – even if I'm urging them on every day :o)

### **10) Use and value diversity**

Diversity is key to a healthy and resilient system and it makes it more beautiful and exciting to be a part of – very unlike the food deserts of modern agriculture. If one crop has a bad year, there will always be others with good yields if you have diversity.

In the design we have aimed at a wild biodiversity – some of the plants are experiments and we are not sure if they will thrive and fruit here, but it is well worth a try. It is also exciting to try new crops – new food – new texture. Some more delicious than others....but it is also a journey getting to know the crops and how to use them. I am sure that eating food in season and eating a much greater variety of foods will create more health and energy in the body, just like it does in a forest garden.

It is also a great hobby finding specimens or seed of plants you don't have and connecting with other perma-plant-nerds through that activity :o)

### **11) Use edge – value the marginal**

Where two environments meet magic happens :o) It is the most diverse and interesting place in a system as more and new possibilities arise in that meeting.

We have tried to maximize edge in the forest garden by design - f.ex. around the vegetable spiral and the pond but also in mimicking the young, open forest with the spacing of the trees, so that ideally much of the forest garden floor will feel and function like a forest edge – at least in the first 10-15 years of succession. There are lots of edges in the old part of the garden that we really value and work with to maximize diversity and productivity.

## **12) Creatively use and respond to change**

To us this whole project and change of life situation is part of a creative response to change. We need to find new ways and solutions and it is a very exciting time – and scary too.

The summers have been very hot and very, very dry these last 10 years – this is a challenge for some crops but it also makes it possible to grow new things – like melons and yacon. We have also planted some trees that wouldn't normally fruit here, but perhaps with the extra heat and the longer summers they will.

When we were building the retreat centre the financial markets crashed and we were practically out of work and out of money, but it was a very stimulating creative period for us as we found ways to keep on building and use materials and find solutions that we wouldn't otherwise have thought of. It was a really rewarding process and the great thing is that these solutions are also part of what people find most inspiring when they visit.

Whatever the change, we will find a response :o)