



# permaculture



*'web of life' game on a design course*

## what is it?

Permaculture is a design system. It's the direct application of the principles of ecology in the design of sustainable human habitats. Many people think permaculture is just about growing things; and although there is a large focus on food production (we all need food), it goes way beyond that – into health, education, community, architecture, economics and more. It brings sustainability into all aspects of life. Permaculture pulls its resources from 3 main areas: nature, traditional (usually less environmentally-damaging) systems, and modern scientific and technological knowledge.

In the early 70s, the concept of permaculture was formed by Bill Mollison and his then student David Holmgren in Australia. It was based on Mollison's observations of natural systems, and how resilient, productive and self-sustaining they were. He thought that if we could design those attributes into our food production, it could be as sustainable as natural systems. As they started to develop their ideas, they became aware that the same principles could be applied elsewhere, and that it was a way of conserving and building natural resources to supply a whole range of human needs, including timber, fuel, medicines and livelihoods. And beyond that, they could be applied to how we run our economic, educational and social systems as well.

Mollison and Holmgren developed a basic permaculture design course, and the first generation of participants went on to run their own courses, and since then it has spread throughout the world. In 1983, the Permaculture Association of Britain (PAB) was formed. Now many countries have established national and regional associations that are linked globally, and as well

as the basic design course, offer short introductory courses, specialist courses in applied design, teacher training and online courses. There is also a diploma in applied design, available after a minimum of 2 years proven permaculture application. The UK has been at the forefront of developing the permaculture diploma pathway for design course graduates.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of backyard gardens, farms, smallholdings, waste land, communities and small businesses have been designed using permaculture principles.

## what are the benefits?

Permaculture can be applied to already functioning systems that have elements of unsustainability (high waste, high input systems), or to the blank canvas of a bare, degraded landscape. The chief benefits of using permaculture design are that it reduces waste, pollution and work, by integrating systems and elements within systems. Just as in nature there is no waste, pollution or work – in a permaculture system, resources are recycled, and the needs of one part of the system can be met by the outputs of another part of the system. For example, a chicken in the wrong place can trash a vegetable plot, but in the right place it can eat weed seeds and insect pests, and scratch up and manure the ground as well as providing eggs and meat. So it's about giving elements more functions by putting them in the right place.

Another benefit is that it represents a much more efficient use of space. Instead of monoculture, permaculture involves 'stacking' plants of different heights, and integrating animals into the same space. Another type of 'stacking' involves adding value to products locally – e.g. a glut of fruit at a



*chickens providing manure and pest control in a recently-established forest garden*

