

# ELFIN PERMACULTURE DESIGN AND CONSULTING SERVICES

## *Elfin Permaculture*

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### **What Does an Elfin Permaculture Design Do?**

A permaculture design helps people develop the specific lifestyle they wish to live in a specific place. Permaculture design clients typically are environmentally concerned people seeking increased self-reliance. We write a report of recommendations for achieving specific goals such as energy independence, food self-reliance, alternative incomes and so forth. The report marries the stated goals, preferences and resources of the residents with the potential and ecological needs of the site. The design provides the residents with a plan by which they can meet their objectives by constructive development of the site as a whole system. The design process and the design itself emulate the principles by which Nature designs her ecosystems to efficiently utilize conditions of soil, moisture, climate, sun, orientation and available species to make and engender as much life as possible both in quantity and in diversity.

Permaculture designs take a holistic approach--everything is functionally connected to everything else in the design for maximum efficiency. Conservation of resources--the client's and Nature's --is the over-riding principle of permaculture design. Change for its own sake is avoided. Designs plan to become increasingly self-regulating and self-maintaining as they mature.

### **How is the Design Prepared?**

Suppose that you notify us that you want a permaculture design. First, you buy from our sister enterprise, Yankee Permaculture, a copy of our Permaculture Design Client Survey. This is about 20 pages of questions for you to answer as fully as possible. Included in the purchase price is a review of your answers by the author, Dan Hemenway, Elfin Permaculture's lead designer. He will recommend how to proceed. If you decide to have a design prepared by us, we will interview everyone involved and also examine the site for which the design will be prepared. Based on what you want and what the site offers and needs, we will make our report.

### **What Topics are Covered in an Elfin Permaculture Design?**

Elfin Permaculture designs begin with a review of who the clients are and what we understand them to require from the design, as well as a brief description of the design site itself. It is hoped that this detached narrative will give the client another perspective on his/her situation and goals. The balance of the report consists of design recommendations.

Topics routinely covered in Elfin Permaculture designs are:

- **Food and Nutrient Cycles.** Food production is usually part of the design. Permaculture designs typically specify tree crops, unconventional gardening methods, and solar greenhouses as part of the domestic food production system. Aquaculture, bees, small stock, poultry, and other foraging animals are frequently included. Soil management is treated in this section, as is disposition of human wastes, development of forage systems, food preservation, and control of potential pests. For some clients, commercial food production and/or processing is designed.
- **Energy.** All relevant options for energy production are evaluated, typically including solar, wind, waterpower, biomass, and other biological forms of energy. Then we look at applications for energy such as transportation, space heating and/or cooling, cooking, hot water, food preservation, and operation of equipment. First describing relevant conservation measures, we then detail specific proposals for utilizing available energy for the remaining work at hand.
- **Water.** With the availability of high quality fresh water in drastic decline worldwide, obtaining useful amounts of healthful water is of paramount concern in the permaculture design. Typical domestic designs include roof catchment systems. Designs for larger properties ordinarily provide for creation of ponds where runoff can be stored for gravity feed to the point of use. Systems for treating and using greywater and other contaminated water often contribute to a permaculture design. The water portion of the design follows that described for energy above, first looking at the resources and then the needs. The design represents our best thinking on utilizing such resources responsibly. In some designs, excessive erosion or destructive floodwaters require special treatment.
- **Shelter.** For existing housing, shelter recommendations of our designs detail retrofit for energy efficiency, food production, increase in quality living space, and housing of plants and animals appropriate to the needs and desires of the client. If new buildings are required, we often can recommend designs and construction methods that use local materials, preferably from the site. The designs for new buildings save money and energy compared with conventional approaches. Shelterbelt plantings, shade in hot weather and more efficient space utilization frequently result from design recommendations.
- **Hazards and Problems.** While hazards vary considerably from site to site, usually some of the following risks can be anticipated and mitigated to a degree: extremes of weather, earthquake, tsunami or tidal wave, fire, pollution and human violence. Dangerous activities proposed by clients need to be addressed. These might be use of toxic substances, unfortunately common in the practice of many crafts (e.g. chromium in leather work), or physical activities on site. For example, one set of clients proposed retiring to the country after a lifetime of professional work and urban living, and cutting their own firewood. The risk of injury to unskilled, unfit people in the very dangerous work of felling trees is about 100%. We expressed concern and proposed alternatives.
- **Special Treatments.** Often, a client will have a specific goal best treated in its own section of the design. One client had a wetlands that could not be "developed" for environmental reasons. He wanted to get a personal benefit from it nonetheless. We designed a use strategy that improved the water storage and purification function of the wetlands, protected adjacent wetlands, and gave him some direct yields.

- **Economics.** Design implementation usually costs money. Permaculture designs achieve their goals while staying within the means of the client. Almost everyone needs a certain amount of income. Our designs develop income when needed and provide ways to pay for the design implementation when needed. Often a special interest or skill of the client can earn money utilizing the site's resources.
- **Staging.** Elfin Permaculture designs specify the sequence in which to implement the design recommendations and, where relevant, how long each step should take. This enables us to use one aspect of the design to prepare the way for the next, permits generating resources to implement the design as we go along, and avoids the confusion and overload of trying to implement the entire design at once. Also, we believe that life-style changes are best undertaken in manageable steps so that the skills and behaviors required are comfortably mastered before the next step is undertaken.

### **What Skills and Training are Needed to Develop a Permaculture Design for My Home?**

No new skills or training is needed to implement any properly prepared permaculture design, except those which you have indicated an interest or willingness to develop during the interview or in the survey. The design is intended to work with the client as s/he is and the site as it is with no forced changes on either part. Techniques, management strategies, products and resources which may not be readily available are all detailed in an extensive set of appendices to the design, including a reading list, a list of people and organizations who can provide skills, information or other resources you will need, a list of suppliers of plants and products not commonly available and so forth. We strive to recommend practical measures that the client can actually perform in a reasonable time. Appendices also furnish background information relevant to specific design recommendations where this is the most practical way to provide it, species lists, and generic "standard designs" for problems which are common enough so that it is more useful to develop a general design solution rather than treat it in the highly customized design report.

### **What Living Situations Call for a Permaculture Design?**

Our design experience includes urban, suburban and rural situations, large properties and small, and even rented properties. We have design experience in almost all climatic regimes from the humid tropics to frigid climates in northern Ontario, Canada, and in maritime, humid, and semi-arid climates. **The main requirement for a permaculture design is to want one**--to intend a lifestyle that grows increasingly self-reliant while increasingly benefiting the Earth.

### **Then Do You Think Everyone Should Commission a Permaculture Design?**

No! Whenever possible we recommend that the person(s) who want(s) a permaculture design learn to produce their own design. We offer a Permaculture Design Course, the basic introduction for people who wish to work in the permaculture movement, and a 10-day or two-week workshop, expressly for people to acquire skills to use permaculture in their own lives. The full design course runs six months online, or can be taken intensively in a live three-week program in some countries. We do not host live programs ourselves but wait until an individual or group wants one sufficiently to do the work and risk the money to host one. Permaculture is a self-reliance movement. Often someone who wants a design will host a course or workshop on their site and get not only input from the instructor but also from the students who undertake a design for the site as the major activity of the program. Only when attending or hosting a workshop or course is impractical do we recommend our professional design services. Financially, it is much cheaper to host a course, even if it loses a bit of money (and it could earn money), than to contract for a design. Sometimes a person who received introductory design training will engage us on a consultant basis to help with one component of the design where experience is critical. They then incorporate our advice into their design.

### **What Kind of Consulting Work Do You Do?**

We can consult on any of the areas commonly treated in the design. (See above.) Besides siting a house on the property, we think the most useful consulting work we do is to help people evaluate real estate to buy. Selecting the site upon which to build the house and siting and designing water features also greatly benefit from experience. By obtaining and completing the Permaculture Design Client Survey, many design problems "solve themselves" as the correct course of action becomes self-evident when the survey questions are answered. Elfin Permaculture is also available to do specialized or advanced design work for other permaculture designers.

### **How are Your Fees Based?**

All design work by Elfin Permaculture begins when the client completes the Permaculture Design Client Survey. If the design job is very simple, we can quote a design fee on the insights provided by the Survey responses. Otherwise, we defer our quotation until after the client interview and site visit. These are charged at consulting rates, which can be deducted from the full design fee if the client decides to proceed with a full permaculture design. See our fee table for current details. Large and complex designs can be done in stages whereby an overall design is prepared in broad detail (called a predesign) and very specific design recommendations are prepared as needed prior to implementation of that portion of the design. If we do not think that we can save you money through our design services over a reasonable time, we will recommend another approach.

### **Does a Permaculture Design Replace Architectural and Engineering Work?**

No. Permaculture supplements these other types of design when they are required. Whenever possible, it is helpful to have architects and engineers work in collaboration with the permaculture designer.

### **Who Does Elfin Permaculture Design Work?**

Dan Hemenway, founder of Elfin Permaculture, and Cynthia Baxter Hemenway, work as a husband/wife partnership in Elfin Permaculture Designs. Dan, who does much of the design work, has taught permaculture design in a number of countries in North America, Europe, Asia, and the Pacific Islands. He holds five advanced diplomas from the International Permaculture Institute in Australia, operated a homestead self-reliant in food and energy for a decade and has professional experience in food production and alternative energy projects. Dan has been active in permaculture since 1981, Cynthia since 1988. She is a holistic health practitioner and a Certified Nurse Midwife, activities that she integrates with permaculture. Dan and Cynthia have practiced permaculture in their own lives in Massachusetts, Ontario, Kansas, Georgia and Florida where they have now live. In addition, Elfin Permaculture Associates, an informal group of cooperating permaculture designers, provides us with expertise in areas of health and health care, venture economics, engineering and sustainable energy. From time to time, trainees in Elfin Permaculture's Advanced Permaculture Training (APT) program may provide input to designs under Dan's supervision.

THE CONTENTS PAGES THAT FOLLOW ARE TAKEN FROM AN ACTUAL DESIGN. THEY REPRESENT A SAMPLE OF TOPICS TREATED.

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**Forest Ecosystem Rescue Network (FERN)**

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**NOTE:** Permaculture designs for sites in a wide range of latitudes from tropics to extreme cold are offered in our special order catalog, listed as Permaculture Paper No. 27 in the Yankee Permaculture Order Form.

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We offer two FERN programs:

- A **weekend workshop**, or better a weekend conference, forms a FERN

chapter. We prefer to serve as catalyst to local folks to define the local problem, set an agenda, and initiate a strategy.

• **Slide/lectures.** We have three bodies of slides. 1) Fate of Our Forests overview. Documents various causes of forest loss in both temperate and tropical regions, with emphasis on "decline" of temperate forests. Discussion follows on what the people present can do to improve the situation. 2) Temperate tree decline. A rather brute-force lesson in identifying trees and forests in decline, including photographs from Germany, the US, Canada and some other countries. We usually use at least two trays of slides in this presentation, and everyone who sits through it recognizes tree decline when they see it thereafter. It is very motivating. Our most effective volunteers recruited themselves following this presentation. 3) We also have a body of slides showing healthy forests. When possible, we follow "2)" above with the healthy forest slides, mixing in some more decline slides well into the program to establish the contrast between sick and healthy forest. Once people see what a forest should look like, they are even more able to recognize a sick forest.

### **Permaculture Programs**

**Lectures.** We offer a very effective slide/lecture presentation that establishes some of the environmental problems that required the development of permaculture and some of the principles we use in permaculture design to address these problems. It ends with examples of permaculture design. No limit on number of attendees.

**One Day Workshop.** We arrive at the site a day or so early and develop some basic permaculture design ideas that can be communicated in a lecture format. When the participants arrive, we first review some basic permaculture principles

**Two-Week Workshop.** This program resembles the 10-day intensive, except that it begins on a Monday and therefore does not include a weekend workshop at its inception. The two-week workshop can be less intensive than the 10-day program, making the longer workshop more suitable where most participants will be commuting and therefore less likely to work every night on the design project. Alternately, the two-week program is very successful as an intensive experience when we give the workshop in translation. Even though the amount of material imparted in the classroom is about the same, the longer time in which to work with the information helps people better integrate

and concepts, and then take a site walk. Following the site walk, we begin to flesh out the initial concepts for the permaculture design for the place. It is useful to make our basic lecture (described above) available the evening before a one-day workshop for people who want to make the most of this very fast exposure to the permaculture process. Limit: 40 attendees.

**Weekend Workshop.** This is our most effective short program. (While normally given on a weekend as the name implies, it can be given any two days in succession.) It begins with our introductory slide presentation Friday night, followed by discussion. The next morning, we explore basic principles of permaculture design. After lunch we have a field walk. (So far very much like the one-day workshop).

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### **Lectures, Workshops, and Courses Brief Descriptions**

Then we divide the participants into teams. They prepare the draft design for the place, meet back in class from time to time to check progress, coordinate among the teams, and impart any special information that they may need. Participants are encouraged to sign up for the team for which they are least qualified, and then to solicit information needed for their part of the design from other participants, with the instructor the consultant of last resort. The instructor has spent time before the workshop developing a design approach to the site. He leads the design process when the teams might otherwise bog down. By Sunday afternoon, participants present the first draft of a permaculture design. concepts and apply them better to their design project. Class meets Monday through Saturday for two weeks. Maximum enrollment: 30.

**Permaculture Design Course.** This three-week program (five or six weeks in translation) carries certification as a permaculture design trainee for successful students. The program is intensive and inclusive, surveying a wide range of information and concepts necessary to successfully practice permaculture. It includes class work, a student design project, slide presentations, presentations by the students, and extensive slides and other audio-visual materials. A four-week version covers the topic: Permaculture Design for Communities. (Certification

We have surprisingly good carry-through into the subsequent lives of participants with permaculture concepts following a weekend workshop. Maximum enrollment: 25.

**10-Day Permaculture Design Intensive.** This workshop effectively helps people achieve beginning competence at permaculture design. It is so effective, that we recommend it as a supplement to the full Permaculture Design Course, which covers much more information but presents less opportunity for design experience. In the 10-day program, participants work night and day for 10 days on a permaculture design for the workshop site. (...or one very nearby, if necessary.) The intensive begins with the standard weekend workshop format, allowing opportunity for some people to attend the initial weekend if we are not able to fill the 10-day program. Over the balance of the week, participants refine and revise the draft design produced in the first weekend. They draft a full permaculture design report that addresses shelter, energy, food, nutrient cycles, health, aesthetics, economics, community and other factors involved in helping the residents of the site meet their goals while nurturing the ecosystem around them. Class work during the week consists of presentations by the instructor, and by knowledgeable participants, on subjects necessary to complete the design. Topics vary according to problems and resources uncovered as the design process unfolds. The instructor brings all the outlines and slides and other materials needed to teach the full, three-week permaculture design course, selecting from these to meet the needs of the group. Design work is often impressive. Class meets Friday through Sunday of the following week. Maximum enrollment: 30.

is the same.) Maximum enrollment: 30. Elfin Permaculture also offers a Correspondence Permaculture Design Course.

**Advanced Permaculture Training (APT) Programs.** Elfin Permaculture offers the same range of formats for advanced permaculture, open exclusively to graduates of a Permaculture Design Course. Emphasis is on personal design work and teaching permaculture. We do not encourage permaculture design for others as a career, however we will assist any design course graduate to hone his/her design skills. We develop APT program outlines on a case-by-case basis. APT also offers individualized guided

programs of one to four years for design course graduates.

Our permaculture programs are described in more detail in information sheets, listed on the back of the Yankee Permaculture order form. The shorter programs usually draw participants mainly from the immediate area while programs of 10 days and longer draw from the region and usually attract some people from distant places. While promotion is mainly the host's responsibility, we can support your promotion in various ways, particularly if programs are booked with ample lead time. We consider a program to be scheduled when we have received a deposit reserving the date. Order for a current list of fees and terms from the Information Sheets on the back of the Yankee Permaculture Order form.

Last update 03/09/96