

10 Easy Permaculture Tricks for Your Garden

You may think that you need a large piece of land, abundant free time, and extensive knowledge to genuinely practice permaculture. To jump fully into practicing permaculture gardening, in fact, takes little more than a few square feet of soil, an occasional free hour, and a few bright ideas. Here are a few engaging techniques to wet your appetite and spark your imagination.

Sheet Mulch Your Kitchen Compost

You've heard of overcooking your greens. You can also overcook your compost. Instead of baking those juicy nutrients in a segregated pile return them directly to the soil surface to feed soil organisms and plants. Just find an area where you would like to fertilize the soil and spread the fresh compost on the surface. Once spread, earthworms will surface to the compost at night or during damp weather and begin a healthy, natural, nutrient-preserving breakdown process. To acquiesce disapproving neighbors or create a more traditionally tidy looking garden spread straw or leaf mulch over the fresh compost after application. You have just saved yourself compost turning, spreading, and tilling.

Grow a Mixed Meadow

Every lawn is a mixed meadow in waiting. To create a mixed meadow you must refrain from mowing until your lawn is at least two, preferably three or four feet tall. The greater the diversity of weed species in your lawn the richer your mixed meadow will be. This meadow will attract a diversity of insects, conserve soil moisture, and of course allow wildflowers to bloom. Your meadow is ready for a mow whenever you feel inspired to experience a change. (Eugene's tall grass ordinance will require your lawn to be below 18 inches during June). To encourage a greater diversity in your meadow refrain from summer watering (this will weaken the traditional lawn grasses) and let your favorite species go to seed.

Grow Hedges and Wildlife Thickets.

Many people build fences to create urban privacy. Wood fences waste precious forest resources, look unnatural, and require eventual replacement. A "living fence" of shrubs can provide a permanent screen complete with showy flowers, food production, and wildlife habitat. A good permaculture hedge should include a wide variety of plants. A few excellent Pacific Northwest choices for hedges are: Red-Osier Dogwood (fast growth), Pacific Wax Myrtle (attractive evergreen), Strawberry Bush (edible fruit), Aronia (showy and edible), Chokeberry (wildlife tree-thicket), and Filbert.

Plant Unusual, Easy to Grow Fruit

Sweet cherries average one productive year in four in the unsprayed home orchard in the Willamette Valley. Himalayan Blackberries and Salal Berries produce every year over a period of several months. There is, in fact, a wide diversity of productive under-appreciated fruit that can be grown in our climate, frequently with little care. This is especially true if you are willing to expand your horizon of acceptable tastes and textures. Growing new fruit varieties will increase the diversity of your diet and give you free access to food prohibitively expensive or nonexistent on the grocery store shelf. A few top choices for culinary pleasures include Figs, Asian Pears, Red Currants, Gooseberries, Persimmons, and Strawberry Bushes. If you enjoy the hardy tastes of native and wild fruit try Salal, Chokeberries, Black Hawthorn, Serviceberry, Elderberries, and Manzanita.

Use Leaves for Weed Control

In the fall gather unused leaves from your neighborhood. Pick up the leaves dropped at curbside on your street or just ask your neighbors to rake their leaves into your yard. Spread the accumulated leaves thickly on all areas you want to keep weed-free for the next year. The leaves will preserve soil moisture, promote

micro-organisms, and make a steady compost addition much faster than the old growth bark so many people spread on their landscapes. Depending on thickness this mulch ought to stay effective from 6 to 12 months.

Water With Timers

Three months of summer drought can create a lot of stress and headache for the committed gardener. Fully programmable electronic timers may not be considered sustainable low-tech, however, they can insure routine, deep watering at appropriate daytimes and intervals. It can also free up hours of time for you to plant more crops, study beneficial insects, or make love in the shade of an apple tree.

The Self Sowing Garden

Feel guilty because you let that broccoli go to seed before harvesting it? Take comfort, you may have just planted next year's garden. Letting your vegetables bloom and drop seed allows your crops to choose the microclimate and germination date that is to their liking. I have harvested tomatoes, tomatilloes, chard, lettuce, mustard greens, mizuna, arugula, corn salad, spinach, potatoes, cucumbers, zucchini, winter squash, and fava beans off of self-sowed plants. To encourage self-sowing you will need to selectively weed the soil throughout the year so as to create a variety of germination and growth opportunities for patiently waiting seeds.

Study Your Weeds

Weeds are much, much more than their reputation suggests. There is a long list of edible and medicinal weed plants. Many weeds help bring deep soil nutrients to the surface while others are excellent groundcovers and soil protectors. Identifying and appreciating your weeds will turn what looked like a wasteland into a fascinating lush jungle. You will be able to practice permaculture merely by admiring, investigating, and protecting the habitat of the weeds you once tried to eradicate. A brief list of beneficial and beautiful weeds must include Chickweed, Plantain, Dandelion, Mullein, Wild Sweet Pea, St. John's Wort, Tansy, Red Hawthorn, and Himalayan Blackberry.

Save Human Fertilizer

Human urine is extremely high in Nitrogen. Despite most people's initial aversion to its garden use, it is hygienically safe and sterile, readily available, and easy to save. Unfortunately, every day hundreds of gallons are flushed into the sewer and chemical fertilizers are used in its stead. To avoid burning vegetation during application I recommend diluting it by one half and watering the soil around the base of the plants. Daily emptying of your urine containers will help minimize odor.

Neighborhood Food Harvesting

It is not necessary to grow your own fruit and vegetables to be able to harvest abundant local free food supplies. Eugene, Springfield, as well as surrounding rural areas are filled with abandoned orchards and unharvested fruit and nut trees. Many are pickable from alleys or bicycle paths. For hard to access trees ask home owners; most are quite happy to share excess harvest. Once you begin to identify unusual edibles you will also discover such back alley and neighborhood treats as big leaf maple flowers, japanese knotweed shoots, daylily blossoms, and black hawthorn berries. Curious looks from passers by and adjoining property owners are excellent opportunities for a little community education.

By [Heiko](#), v. 1.0, Thursday 8, June, 2000.