

How to Plan and Develop a Permaculture Site

What is often left out in much of permaculture teaching is the “how to install the design”. And not only what that entails, but steps in how to do it. It is most manageable when the design is implemented in stages, (you cannot put a the electrical systems into a building without the mainframe support in), and should build upon each other. As well, it is wise to note that it is possible for some of the later steps to be started in earlier stages – this is encouraged when possible.

The design process in permaculture design has an architectural thinking process where things are analyzed and thought through all at once. However, when we are implementing and developing a site, not all of those processes are installed at one time. Now the thinking switches to one of a builder instead of an architect. As in almost all of permaculture there is no “one way” to accomplish any one thing. The steps and stages below are proven and shown to work, but they are only “a” way to develop a site and, where applicable, can be modified and built upon.

An order for establishment:

(Take out whatever is not applicable to your site, for example - fencing may not be needed in an urban design)

1. Water

Proper watershed develop is the primary development step. Earthworks such as swales, terraces, gabions, and ponds are the first elements installed and the foundation to build upon.

2. Access

Roads, pathways, and fencing are crucial to further development. We do not really need access for a bulldozer to come in and build a pond. However, if we want to build a house then proper routes need quality placement. Roads and pathways serves for many functions (hard surface

run off, [light albedo](#), etc...). The access through fences is very important as well. Where fences are placed and what goes through the gate of a fence (tractors, people, cattle, etc...) are topics to be analyzed in the design process.

3. Structures

Now that we can move around the site with somewhat of ease (because access has been installed) we can start with building creation. Bathrooms (if not part of the dwelling), showers, and kitchens are usually constructed first with people staying in temporary shelters such as a basic yurt or tents (if people are staying on site or organizing a natural building course around the build). Then the main living quarters and/or learning areas are built.

4. Soil Conditioning

Soil conditioning can be started in the earthworks stage (ripping). This stage can include keyline plowing, cover cropping, mulching systems, erosion control, and even the starting of microbial inoculation through bio fertilizers and compost teas. This step is a necessary precursor to plantings. (Here is a [video](#) that shows soil prep for a kitchen garden bed).

5. Plantings

Now that we know where the structures will be, can easily access the property, and started prepping the soil, we can move on to the next stage – planting. Food forestry, pastures, perennial and annual cropping, and kitchen and functional gardens can now be installed. (Learn more : [Food Forest](#), [Desert Garden](#), [A new look at crop rotation](#)).

6. Animals

Animal tractoring and grazing management are exceptional techniques utilized in permaculture sites and especially closed looped farming systems. It can work out, and is encouraged, that plants and animals are introduced at the same time. However, when working with restraints such as funds, animals come in after plantings.

7. People / Maintenance

In the design stage – the invisible structures should be addressed – such as single house or community ethics, decision making processes, money

making factors, etc... (and just like plant systems, these will change and evolve over time) This step, however, works with the maintenance of the systems and the who does what / when. Without proper maintenance sites can crash and investments lost.

It is important to note that not all parts of every stage need to be established at once. Look at the economic realities. If you have a 100 acre property and only the funds to develop 5 acres – then the 5 acres moves on to stage 1. Also if you are considering becoming a permaculture design consultant and want to establish sites these stages/steps are of great of interest and should get quite a bit of attention in learning and/or extra courses.