

Beauty and ethics at play in landscaping

Permaculture's greatest contribution to landscaping and, perhaps to all of human culture is its ability to enhance our understanding of beauty.

Beauty is often something we see, smell, taste, listen to or touch. But we are attracted to ideas and feelings, too. Efficient cars seduce us. Productive businesses lure us in. People who seem to be ethical (or at least agree with our understanding of ethics) appeal to our higher selves.

Undeniably, there is a form of beauty that resides outside the five physical senses in our thoughts and emotions.

As a design science founded in ethics and having efficiency as its method and productivity as its goal, permaculture excites an understanding of a deeper sense of aesthetics. Physical beauty is not unimportant in permaculture, but permaculture also attempts to attract people to the land on a variety of other levels.

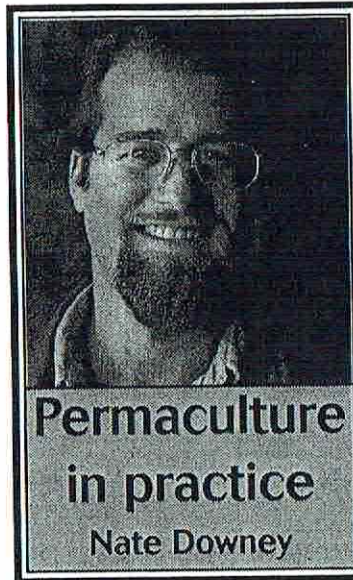
Take two common plants: the rose and the raspberry.

Most people would say that the rose is more attractive than the raspberry. More often than not, from a purely visual (or aromatic) perspective, this is true. If, however, we give more credence to our taste buds, most of us would find the raspberry more attractive.

If we enhance our understanding of beauty to include the attractive quality of an ethic based on earthcare and its corollary, care for people (as permaculture does) the raspberry would often be viewed as a more attractive landscape element than the rose.

As a food source, raspberry plants provide us with a way to tread more lightly on our planet's ecosystems and can make our lives happier and healthier.

All edible plants that become part of the local landscape give us an attractive opportunity. Rather than depending on the wasteful and polluting systems of modern agriculture (not to mention all of the associated transportation and packaging costs), edible plants can be consumed



locally with no negative costs to the environment. As people become increasingly interested in ecological issues, the attractiveness of edible plants becomes increasingly apparent.

Edible plants, incorporated into the ornamental landscape, also have the attractive effect of making life easier for people. Although there is always some work associated with consuming food from one's

landscape, the work associated with food bought at the grocery store is far greater when one considers the cost of the product, the cost of driving to and from the store, as well as the time wasted while doing such errands. This convenient attribute of edible plants is further enhanced for those who find that their daily levels of stress to be reduced by putting in the garden.

In addition to having these convenient and stress-relieving qualities, most people are aware that local produce grown without pesticides will enhance the quality of their lives from a wellness perspective. Not only can food become contaminated by chemicals it absorbs, but produce loses nutrients as time passes between harvest and consumption. Moreover, it just tastes better.

Changing a culture's aesthetic understanding is a slow process. Although I have promoted the use of edible plants for years, I have suggested planting

many more roses than raspberries. Sometimes the intrinsic, physical beauty of a thing is simply overwhelming. Other times it is best to work within the existing aesthetic in order to have an opportunity to incorporate a new one.

The importance of this new aesthetic, however, should not be underestimated. As we become more and more dependent on an international web of food production and distribution, we become more and more susceptible to problems outside of our control. It is this new, expanded understanding of beauty that may be the key to reducing this unhealthy level of dependency.

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