

# A check from the IRS? Invest in your land



## Permaculture in Practice

by Nate  
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The check's in the mail. Well, not exactly. A letter from the IRS telling you about your check in the mail is in the mail. Hmmm.

As we Americans all know, when you get your bribe from the president, you should go out and spend it. But why not spend it in a way that is both ethical and profitable? Here are some suggestions from the permaculture perspective:

**Sow seed.** If your check happens to be on the small side, buy cool-season vegetable seed like spinach, lettuce, kale, chard or peas. Plant it soon. But, buyer beware: Many seeds sold these days are sterile, genetically engineered to make you buy more. Plants of the Southwest has a great selection of heirloom seed packets as well as

native and appropriate bulk seed.

**Plant a fruit tree.** Fruit trees are a particularly good investment. For less than \$75 you can buy a decent-size tree, compost, organic fertilizer, mulch and a set of tree stakes. In a few years you can begin to enjoy its fruits. Tooley's Trees up in Truchas is a great local source for drought-tolerant, cold-hardy varieties.

**Install drip irrigation.** If time is money, drip irrigation buys you at least a square foot of real estate somewhere downtown. You'll need a battery-operated clock, a filter, a pressure regulator, tubing, emitters, at least one end cap and all the necessary couplings, barbs, T's, L's and Y's.

If you're already confused, don't be. It's easy, but I'd recommend a visit to The Firebird. You can get out of there for less than \$150 and they'll teach you how it works. Think of the time you will save when you no longer have to run around every other morning with a hose as you look to see if any of your neighbors busted you spilling on the concrete walk.

**Mulch your yard.** Santa Fe Greenhouses and Payne's deliver

bulk bark and compost, which are great mulching materials. Gravel can be a low-maintenance mulch if laid properly over a permeable weed barrier. Standard colors and sizes can be delivered by companies listed in the "Sand and Gravel" section of the yellow pages. Santa Fe Stone, Milestone and Cuyamunge Stone sell the more pricey colors and textures better for small areas, pathways or aesthetic accents.

The Feed Bin and Monte Vista Feed sell my favorite mulch: straw. Many horse stables off West Alameda charge a small loading fee for manure, which is always well worth it. As a mulch, manure is best under straw and even better under straw and on top of corrugated cardboard. But that's a topic for a future column.

**Catch rainwater in a pumice wick.** Regular readers of this column understand pumice wicks. Basically, they're skinny sponges protruding from water-runoff sources such as roofs and driveways. Plant next to pumice wicks; plants thrive around the mini-aquifer right at their root zone. Pumice is not expensive, and can

be delivered by Coppola, Santa Fe Concrete and numerous branches of the Montaño family.

If you pay a water bill, pumice wicks can eventually pay for themselves. If you happen to live near an edge of an arroyo, install wicks to prevent erosion. They will soon increase the value of your property, especially if directed to a windbreak, garden, trellis or small orchard.

Actually, all of these suggestions will increase the value of your property and they'll usually provide rates of return higher than the rates of most stock portfolios. Unlike many investments (including most types of home improvements), the value of a landscape physically grows as plant material grows. Paints chip. Pipes rust. Wood rots. Concrete cracks. Roofs leak. But, as dependably as the government, plants grow.

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