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# Brother, can you shift your paradigm?



## Permaculture in Practice

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What if our economic future makes the Great Depression look like Atalaya Mountain on a clear day but we're actually heading for Santa Fe Baldy in a summer monsoon?

Such a "worst-case" scenario is extremely unlikely but since the Dow's record drop, who has not considered this scenario? As a permaculturalist, I am trained to see solutions in problems, to generate positive yields, and to design systems that prevent catastrophe.

Wish me luck.

With the outpouring of American neighborliness that I have seen recently, I believe we can overcome any economic hurdle. But a

cultural movement toward greater sustainability sure would help.

During the Great Depression people had friends and family who grew much of their own food. Today, most of us would have lots of work before attaining any sort of self-sufficiency (given any serious disruption of our modern systems). Having lost important skills while living in communities that produce few essentials, we should at least recognize our addiction to an unsustainable lifestyle.

As a practical philosophy, permaculture speaks to this. I'm not talking about the kind of permaculture usually practiced by my ecological, but mainstream, landscaping business. I'm talking about a real purist's approach.

It's an approach requiring the direct involvement of land stewards. It doesn't depend on consultants, designers, and landscape-installation crews. Although all of these are helpful, a desire for sustainability from within each system is crucial. It is essential that people make the ethical decision to transform their lives and become

much more efficient and productive.

Students of permaculture often talk of "paradigm shifts" after which such an ethical decision is easily made. Almost suddenly, they recognize the importance of creating sustainable systems, as opposed to continuing to hang out in an unsustainable one. In case I might prompt some people to explore this concept further, here is some information for inspiration.

- Take a class at Permaculture Institute USA (455-0270 or [www.permaculture.org](http://www.permaculture.org)) or EcoVersity (424-9797 or [www.ecoversity.org](http://www.ecoversity.org)). The next session of "Practical Permaculture," a one-day introductory workshop that I have taught for years, will be held on Nov. 10.

- Read a book. Plants of the Southwest offers some of the best paradigm-shifting books, as does [www.rodaleinstitute.org](http://www.rodaleinstitute.org). Two to check out are Bill Mollison's *Permaculture: A Designer's Manual* and Toby Hemenway's *Gaia's Garden* – among the edible

gardens it features is Mary Zemach's wonderland in Los Alamos.

- Surf the web. Search the word "permaculture" at any search engine for book lists, courses and communities.

- Grow it. Going to plant a tree? Consider a fruit tree. Need some shrubs? Choose edibles like golden currants or raspberries. Need shade from a vine? Plant grapes. If you want grout between your flagstones, use fragrant, colorful, delicious thyme.

- Build it. Permaculture is not only about how to improve your land. It is also about how to build efficient, ecological homes (and commercial spaces, subdivisions, and communities). Before building your dream, consider your sustainable alternatives.

Yes, the world is changing. Let's change it for the better.

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