

Permaculture in Practice

Words carve space for permanent culture

This column landed under my lintel seven years ago when Christopher Peck, one of the Southwest's most talented permaculture teachers, took wing for greener pastures. Peck is now one of the owners of Natural Investment Services, a gainful, yet socially responsible, investment firm (www.naturalinvesting.com). Currently living with his delightful girlfriend on an organic farm in California's lush wine country and for years having a regular column in *Natural Investment News*, I doubt Peck pines for you, dear audience, but I'll always be grateful to him for asking me to adopt his baby.

Looking back, what excites me most is how our language has evolved. These days, for example, the term *permaculture* "never" appears in italics or quotation marks unnecessarily nor does it still pop up with a capital "P" (except recently in *The New Yorker*). Permaculture is a word most locals now understand.

Since those halcyon afternoons when Peck and I sipped burdock tea and watched our scarlet runner beans mount to the sky, this has been the case for a plethora of our once-crunchy lingo. Happily, much of our pat patois has gone mainstream. Here's a mini-lexicon of words that are part of the vernacular of northern New Mexico today, but mostly only bounced around the walls of our eco-argot back then:

active water harvesting – the act of collecting and storing precipitation water in a cistern for later use.

biodiesel – fuel derived from vegetable oil and animal fats, for sale at the corner of Baca and Cerrillos in Santa Fe.

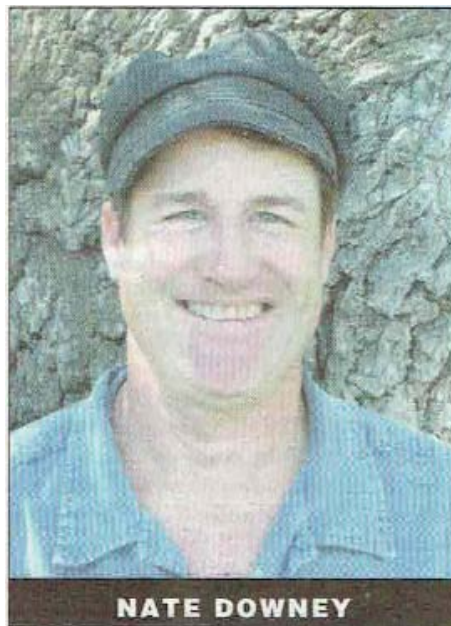
biomass – a renewable energy source such as trees, hemp, and "switchgrass."

bioneer – a biological pioneer. (Coined locally).

blackwater (also black water) — wastewater, or sewage, typically before being purified on site.

cistern – water-storage tank typically associated with active water harvesting.

firescaping – the act of removing combustibles, such as evergreen trees, from fire-prone and/or valuable sectors of a property.



NATE DOWNEY

graywater (also gray water, grey water, greywater) — wastewater from sinks, tubs, showers, washing machines (*sans* diapers) but not from toilets, kitchen sinks, or dishwashers.

hydroseeding (also hydromulching) — the act of sowing seed (or chucking mulch) using water, hoses, or jet-propulsion.

net metering – the act of selling power back to PNM through the use of photovoltaic panels, wind turbines, biomass, biofuels, and a crew of bioneers.

passive water harvesting – the act of slowing the flow of runoff, typically in the soil.

permaculture – 1. a contraction of the words *permanent*, *culture*, and *agriculture*. 2. a system of design that uses natural principles to build soil, harvest water, and produce food and energy on a local scale. 3. a growing movement with sensible solutions to the challenges of our time.

pumice wick – a passive water-harvesting technique using capillary action in an appropriate porous material, such as pumice.

synthetic turf (also fake lawn, plastic grass, or waterless sod) — outdoor carpet designed to look like much of Kentucky and wide swaths of Las Campanas.

toilet retrofit – to exchange a water-guzzling toilet for a low-flow unit.

wattle – a passive water-harvesting and erosion-control structure in the shape of a large sausage, typically filled with straw or bark and wrapped in plastic or jute.

xeriscape (as opposed to the my least favorite non-word of the nineties, "zeroscape") — dryland gardening, often gorgeous.

Nate Downey (424-4444, www.santafepermaculture.com) is president of Santa Fe Permaculture, a locally owned landscape-design firm. His first book, *Harvest the Rain*, will be published this year by Sunstone Press.