Permaculture Design Course:
Core Curriculum
v1.6

Introduction

The curriculum presented here describes the content that must be included in a Permaculture Design Certificate (PDC) course, if a certificate from the Permaculture Association (Britain) is to be awarded.[1]

It is internationally recognised that 'Permaculture: a Designers' Manual' by Bill Mollison is the basis for the PDC curriculum. This curriculum builds on the Designers' Manual and extends the scope to address challenges of the British context, and to reflect the development of the permaculture field since the Designers' Manual was published.

This document states the absolutely essential topics that must be included in a Permaculture Association PDC and optional, but recommended topics *(in italics)*. It does not include a comprehensive list of subjects that the PDC could include; courses will almost certainly include other subjects and may be targeted towards a specific area or group of people, or draw on the expertise of the teacher.

This document does not tell you **how** to teach permaculture. If you are planning a PDC, you can find inspiration in, e.g. 'Permaculture Teachers' Guide' and 'Teaching Permaculture Creatively'.

Background to this document

This curriculum was produced by the Education Working Group, a voluntary group of members of the Permaculture Association. The project consulted widely among British permaculture teachers at key stages, and took place between March 2010 and January 2013. The document will be reviewed on an annual basis. Please contact the office to submit contributions to future versions.

> **DISCLAIMER:**
>
> This document is for use by teachers intending to award a Permaculture Association (Britain) PDC Certificate. It makes no statement regarding the relative quality of any other PDC curriculum, or the suitability of other curricula for any given context.
>
> The Permaculture Association can accept no responsibility for the quality or content of courses that are certified by other organisations.

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1 Externally accredited learning outcomes for the PDC are also available from the Permaculture Association for those who are interested in delivering accredited training. Please contact the office for more information.

ethics ● principles ● design ● action

The Curriculum

1. Context
1.1 The Prime Directive of Permaculture:
"The only ethical decision is to take responsibility for our own existence and that of our children." - Bill Mollison.
1.2 What is permaculture?
1.3 Permaculture as an approach to designing systems (not just land-based systems).

Many teachers also include:
- *A Brief History of permaculture*

2. Ethics
2.1 Earth Care
2.2 People Care
2.3 Fair Shares (originally described as "setting limits to population and consumption")

Refer to *Permaculture: A Designers' Manual* for full definitions.

Many teachers explore different interpretations of the ethics and how they are applied in practice.

3. Principles
The principles below are as they appear in the Mollison's Designers' Manual. Other wordings are acceptable.

3.1 Attitudinal Principles:
- Work with nature, not against
- The problem is the solution
- Make the least change for the greatest possible effect

Many teachers also include:
- *The yield of a system is theoretically unlimited*
- *Start from your back door and work outwards*

3.2 Ecological Principles:
- Cycling of energy & nutrients
- Succession
- Edge
- Microclimate
- Every element performs multiple functions
- Every function is supported by multiple elements

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Many teachers also include:
- ▢ *Everything gardens (or modifies its environment)*
- ▢ *Cooperation rather than competition*
- ▢ *Niche*

3.3 Principles sessions should mention that there are contributions from other sources, e.g. Holmgren, Morrow; you may choose to explore them in depth as well.

4. Design
4.1 Process Frameworks:
- ▢ e.g. SADIM / OBREDIM / other

4.2 Skills, Tools & methods:
- ▢ Observation
- ▢ Client Interview
- ▢ Surveying
- ▢ Maps & Mapping
- ▢ Key Planning Tools:
  - ○ zones
  - ○ sectors
  - ○ relative location
  - ○ input/output analysis

Many teachers also include:
- ▢ *A-frame*
- ▢ *Bunyip*
- ▢ *Plants, animals, structures, tools/technologies, events (PASTE).*
- ▢ *Elevation*
- ▢ *Pacing*
- ▢ *Slope/aspect*
- ▢ *Plus, Minus, Interesting (PMI) evaluation tool*
- ▢ *Conservation & hierarchy of intervention*
- ▢ *Yeoman's scale of permanence*
- ▢ *McHarg's exclusion method*
- ▢ *Limiting factors and hierarchy of resource use*
- ▢ *Random assembly*
- ▢ *Data overlay*
- ▢ *Collaborative decision making*
- ▢ *Phenological/biotime diaries*
- ▢ *Wild design*

4.3 Design Practice
- A series of opportunities to develop and practice design skills, leading to...
- Final design exercise *(This may be individual and/or group exercise)*

- *Group working/process skills, for example:*
  - *Planning and allocating tasks and time*
  - *Decision making in groups*
  - *Communication & conflict resolution*
  - *using permaculture principles & ethics in groups*

4.4 Design Presentation
- Sharing & evaluating design work. The design may be an individual and/or group presentation; creative presentations are encouraged. For distance learning, a design portfolio should be submitted.

- *How to present - presentation skills, hints & tips*
- *How to give & receive feedback (if students are giving each other feedback).*

5. Themes
5.1 Soil
The following topics should be covered:
- Soil food web: macro- and micro-organisms
- Tilling: pros & cons
- Composting
- Mulching
- Soil sampling & analysis: types, textures, pH
- Fertility factors
- Erosion
- Mycorrhizal associations

5.2 Water
The following topics should be covered:
- Rainwater harvesting
- Retention in the landscape (e.g. swales, key line planning etc)
- Water use in the home and domestic water saving
- Aquaculture

5.3 Plants/trees
A minimum of 5 of the following topics should be covered:
- Energy transactions of trees
- Forest gardening

- Agroforestry
- Windbreaks & shelterbelts
- Riparian buffers
- Grassland management; holistic management
- Indicator plants
- Orchards
- Sustainable woodland management
- Guilds

5.4 Built environment
A minimum of 3 of the following topics should be covered:
Recommended topics:
- Buildings & the home
- Urban permaculture
- Transport
- Domestic renewable energy
- Energy efficient planning in the urban context (zones, sectors, elevation etc).

5.5 Social systems/contexts:
A minimum of 5 of the following topics should be covered:
- Zone 00: personal resilience
- Community (4 generations model, transition towns etc)
- Health & wellbeing*
- Finance & Economics*
- Land Tenure & Community Governance*
- Culture & Education*
- Communication skills

6. Next Steps & Further Information
- Introduction to the Permaculture Association (Britain) and why/how to become a member.
- Diploma in Applied Permaculture Design
- *Establishing/linking with local groups*
- *Further learning goals*
- *Identifying allies*
- *Setting up action learning guilds/peer support groups*

* See Holmgren: Permaculture Principles & Pathways Beyond Sustainability, p xx (in the preface) for topic breakdown.