

SHOPPING FOR A PERMACULTURE DESIGN COURSE? History and Current Situation in Washington State and Surrounding Regions.

By Michael Pilarski, Friends of the Trees Society, May 23, 2010

The following 16 permaculture design courses are all the courses I know of being offered in, or near, Washington state this year, 7 in Washington State, 4 in northern Oregon, 1 in Idaho and 4 in British Columbia. I do not have as intimate a knowledge of Oregon's courses so did not attempt to review all of Oregon's courses in this article. The reason for this article is to give an overview of the kinds of courses being offered, their prices, instructors and some comparisons. The article is meant to be a service to people looking to take a course and to the permaculture community in general.

Permaculture is a design science with a set of principles and ethics. Permaculture is a holistic, integrated systems methodology which deals with ecosystem health, food production, the built environment, and energy, as well as social and economic systems. "Permaculture is the conscious design and maintenance of agriculturally productive ecosystems, which have the diversity, stability and the strength of natural ecosystems. It is the harmonious combination of land and people, supplying their food, energy, shelter and other material and non-material needs in a sustainable way. Without sustainable agriculture there is no possibility of a sustainable human culture." Permaculture Malawi.

The first ever permaculture design course was held in 1980 in Australia. The first permaculture design course offered in the Pacific Northwest was in 1982 at Evergreen State College's organic farm in Olympia, Washington. Australian Andrew Jeeves was the instructor and Bill Mollison (the co-founder of permaculture) taught for three days. I was a graduate of this first NW course along with 25 other people. It changed the course of my life, which is a common comment from people after their first pdc (permaculture design course).

During the rest of the 1980s it was typical for one to three courses to be offered in Washington each year. Bill Mollison came several times during this time period. In 1986 Mollison taught a course in eastern Washington in the upper Kittitas valley. A course which I hosted and graduated from. It was Bill's first time teaching the dryland permaculture design course curriculum he had just developed. This was the first departure from the standard permaculture design course curriculum which he developed in 1981. In the 1990s the number of courses offered in Washington State gradually grew to become three to five courses a year. In the first decade of the 2000s this number has gradually increased. Eight courses are being offered in Washington in 2010, which is an all-time record for the state. I would estimate that there have been somewhere around 100 permaculture design courses in Washington state to date. With an average graduating class of 20 people that is around 2,000 graduates from Washington pdcs. There probably have been a similar number of courses held in Oregon so far and perhaps 30 in British Columbia. The inland Northwest has had much less action. Three courses in Montana and one in Idaho. There have been about 10 courses in eastern Washington, primarily taught by Simon Henderson or myself. There have been no courses in eastern Oregon to my knowledge. This adds up to around 240 pdcs altogether in the Pacific Northwest. With an average graduating class of 20 people that is around 4,800 graduates from Pacific Northwest pdcs.

Here is a brief rundown on the permaculture design courses being offered in Washington State and vicinity in 2010. For each course I have listed date, title, venue, format, instructors, fees, class size, brief comments, and contact information. Notice that the length and format of the courses varies as well as the prices. There are a number of reasons for the range of course fees. Some venues cost more than others. Some courses are residential and have housing and food costs. Courses have differing emphases and themes. They are all supposed to cover the standard permaculture design course curriculum but some do a better job of this than others. Each teacher has their own expertises, some have worked in more climate zones than others, some have taught many courses and others are just starting their career, each has their own personality and style of teaching.

All of these courses (and instructors) are unique. Pdc's are not cookie-cutter stamp-outs. The diversity of courses means that they can serve a wider range of clients. People can pick the course format, theme and instructors that suits them best. All of these courses have value. Prospective students are encouraged to look at the range of courses available and do some research before choosing their first course. Some people take multiple courses to experience different instructors, bioregions and venues. I have completed 22 full design courses in many states, provinces and countries, most of them as senior instructor. Please note that there is currently no quality control mechanism for pdcs. Some courses claim to offer certification. Until recently there was a course certification program from Bill Mollison's Permaculture Institute in Australia. He has recently closed this program due to the difficulties in insuring quality standards in courses all around the world. There is currently a move afoot to set up certification standards in the US. Just because a course says they offer certification does not necessarily mean they are better than courses which do not make such claims. Prospective students are advised to research the reputations of courses and instructors.

People are not supposed to hang out their shingle as a permaculture consultant or teacher unless they have gone through at least one pdc and hopefully have a lot of practical experience under their belt.

Advanced permaculture design and advanced permaculture teaching courses started being offered in the 1990s. Only permaculture design course graduates can attend. The first advanced courses offered by US instructors started in the last decade. Northwest advanced course teachers include Jude Hobbs, Tom Ward and Andrew Millison.

* February 12-28

Sahale Permaculture Design Course.

Venue: Sahale Retreat Center, Belfair, WA

Format: Two-week residential course.

Instructors: Laura Sweany and Larry Korn. Guest instructor: Deston Denniston.

Cost: \$1195, \$995 early registration.

Class size: 12 graduates.

Comments: This was the fourth course at Sahale. Larry Korn was the translator for Masonabu Fukuoka's book "One Straw Revolution" and has been part of the Northwest permaculture movement since the 1982 Olympia course. Laura Sweany is a relatively new to permaculture teaching. Sahale was a wonderful venue for the first and second Washington State Permaculture Convergence (an event for permaculturists statewide). 115 attended in 2008 and 170 people in 2009.

Info/contact: lauraflora@msn.com (206) 369-7590

* February-September

Tacoma's 1st Permaculture Design Course

Venue: Kings' Books and Tacoma Waldorf School, plus many other sites around Tacoma

Format: Weekends course. One weekend a month including Friday night presentations.

Instructors: Kelda Miller with guest speakers Jenny Pell, Heidi Bohan, Marisha Auerbach and Paul Kearsley.

Cost: \$800-\$650 Sliding Scale.

Class size: 25

Comments: Kelda is a young firebrand of a permaculture teacher who goes out of her way to involve a wide diversity of less privileged folks. Her courses aim to reflect a multi-cultural outlook. The course emphasis is on urban areas.

Info/Contact: Patricia Menzies. Phone: 253-565-2599. sustainabletacomapierce@gmail.com

<http://divineearthgp.com>

* April 3rd - June 13th

Vashon Permaculture Design Course

Venue: Vashon Cohousing, Vashon Island.

Format: Weekends course. 6 Weekends April 3 through June 6, 2010

Instructors: Emet Degirmenci, Kelda Miller; Guests: Larry Korn, Jenny Pell, Mark Musick and Deston Denniston.

Cost: \$650.

Class size: 10. They had a hard time filling the course.

Comments: Emet is new to the Northwest Permaculture scene but brings a lot of experience and an international perspective from her work in Turkey, New Zealand and Australia. Emet is teaching permaculture in Turkey, her native country later this year.

<http://www.koruora.com/>

* May 8-9 to October 9-10

Seattle Permaculture Design Course.

Venue: South Seattle Community College.

Instructor: Toby Hemenway and guests.

Format: Weekend course meets every 2nd weekend of the month from May to October.

Cost: \$900 for 12 full-day classes.

Class size: They are expecting 40 to graduate.

Comments: This is Toby Hemenway's 3rd annual Permaculture Design Course in Seattle. It is sponsored by Seattle Tilth. Toby is a well-known teacher and he has brought in many long-time permaculturists as guest speakers.

Info/Contact: Carrie Niskanen at 206-633-0451 x101, CarrieNiskanen@seattletilth.org

* June to November

Portland Permaculture Design Course

Venue: Portland State University

Instructor: Toby Hemenway and guests.

Format: Six Weekends.

Cost: \$850.

Info/contact: Jenny Leis, patternliteracy@gmail.com 503-548-8459. <http://patternliteracy.com/workshops.html>

* June 11-27

Tryon Farm Permaculture Design Course

Instructors: Marisha Auerbach, Matt Bibeau, Leonard Barret and guests.

Venue: Tryon Life Community Farm, Portland, Oregon

Format: Residential course with non-residential option.

Cost: \$1100 to \$1300 sliding scale. \$850 to \$1,000 for non-residential, local students.

Comments: Tryon farm is an intentional community set in seven acres of rolling meadow, gardens, homes, naturally-built structures, and wooded cliffs which is adjacent to one of Portland's largest urban parks. An oasis preserved from development by a community effort. Grass-roots urban. Marisha is one of the dynamic, 2nd generation wave of permaculture teachers.

Info/contact: permaculture@tryonfarm.org

* June 14–August 27

Oregon Coast Permaculture Immersion,

Instructors: Henry Stanley and Gabe Shaddy-Farnsworth with other guest instructors

Venue: Neah-Kah-Nie Natural Farm, Manzanita, Oregon.

Format: 3-month long immersion course. June 14–August 27, 2010 Class is 3 days a week, tuesday, wednesday, thursday.

Cost: \$1750, Room & basic food staples are included.

Class Size: Small number of participants.

Comments: North coastal Oregon. I added this one because of the long-term format and it is close to Washington. Henry works with Trackers Northwest and Portland's Village Building Convergence and has recently begun teaching courses.

Info/contact: Molly, Trackers Northwest 503-559-2825.

<http://trackerspdx.com/immersion/oregon-coast-permaculture.php>

* June 14-27

Feral Farm Permaculture Course

Venue: Feral Farm, Rockport, Sauk River Valley.

Format: Residential course. Camping.

Instructors: David Zhang and Laura Donahue with guest instructors Matt van Boven, Michael Pilarski, Heidi Bohan.

Cost: \$800.

Class Size: Class size limited to 16.

Comments: A youthful course with young instructors. We will cover 72 hours of permaculture curriculum along with over 10 hours of primitive skills and wilderness awareness. Feral Farm is a model for incorporating edible and useful plants into already existing wild forests.

Info/contact: (360) 223-5767. bellinghampermaculture@gmail.com

<http://www.bellinghampermaculture.com/>

* July 3-17

Earth Activist Training Permaculture Design Course

Venue: River Farm, near Deming Washington (east of Bellingham)

Instructors: Starhawk and friends, with guest teachers Bill Aal and Margo Adair of Tools for Change

Format: Residential course. Mainly tenting.

Cost: \$1400-\$1800 sliding scale until April 1, after \$1500-\$1900.

Class Size: Usually around 25.

Comments: Starhawk is a well-known activist who combines a permaculture design course with activist training. Special focus on social permaculture and affecting the world. Circles, rituals and earth-based spirituality are part of the menu. These Earth Activist Trainings have been held in locations around the US. The curriculum was developed by Starhawk and Penny Livingston, a well-known California pc teacher.

Info/contact: 800-381-7940. earthactivisttraining@gmail.com

www.EarthActivistTraining.org

* July 11–31

Bullock Homestead Permaculture Design Course

Venue: Bullock Permaculture Homestead, Orcas Island.

Cost: \$1900 (\$1800 if paid in full by June 1st)

Instructors: Douglas Bullock, John Valenzuela, Sam Bullock & Dave Boehnlein.

Class Size: Course is limited to 30 participants. The course is full and has a waiting list.

Comments: One of the longest-running, annual courses in the PNW. The Bullock Brothers Homestead is one of the Northwest's premier pc sites. The only 3-week course offered in the PNW. Emphasis on hands-on. A well-known and popular course. Douglas Bullock is one of the Northwest's most experienced teachers. Brothers Douglas, Sam and Joe are all world-class plantspeople and between them have taught in many of the world's climate zones. Their website is a great portal into the national and international permaculture scene.

Info/contact: Dave Boehnlein, 360-840-8483. info@permacultureportal.com

<http://permacultureportal.com/courses>

* July 11-25

Skalitude Permaculture Design Course.

Format: Two-week residential course. Rooms or tenting.

Venue: Skalitude Retreat Center, Carlton, WA (Methow Valley)

Instructors: Michael Pilarski, with guest instructors Andrew Millison, Josho Somine, Deston Denniston, David Sansone and others.

Cost: \$800. Innovative financing proposals considered.

Class Size: 15 to 25.

Comments: This is my course, so I am biased. Excellent facilities and teaching team. Focused on the Pacific Northwest, particularly the Interior Northwest. Andrew Millison is one of the few advanced pc teachers in the US. Pilarski has been teaching pc courses longer than any other Northwest instructor (since 1988). A few of my specialties include home food production, agroforestry, wildcrafting, native edible and medicinal plants, forestry, ecology, barter economies and permaculture cheerleading.

Info/contact: Michael Pilarski, 509-486-4056. Michael@friendsofthetrees.net,

<http://www.friendsofthetrees.net>

* August 16 - 28th

Kamiah Permaculture Course

Venue: FNA Ranch, Kamiah, Idaho

Instructors: Kim and Julie Pagliaro

Cost: \$995.

Comments: This course is added here as it is the only other Inland Northwest course offered this year besides my Skalitude course in eastern Washington. I believe this is the first course at this venue. Includes footage of a Bill Millison and Geoff Lawton

design certificate course in Australia.

Info/Contact: Julie and Kim Pagliaro: kamiahpermaculture@mac.com 208-935-7793.

<http://www.kamiahpermaculture.com/>

British Columbia, Canada.

I don't want to completely ignore our neighbor to the north. So here are the urls of four 2010 pdcs just north of Washington's border.

* April 3-May 16, weekends

Permaculture design course in cooperation with Selkirk College in Nelson, BC

Instructor: Gregoire Lamoureux.

<http://www3.telus.net/permaculture/>

* May 23 - June 4

Permaculture Design Course in Nelson, BC

<http://www.vergepermaculture.ca/courses/permaculture-design-certificate-nelson-bc>

* May 30 - June 12, 2010

Permaculture Design Course in Winlaw, British Columbia.

Instructor: Gregoire Lamoureux.

<http://www3.telus.net/permaculture/>

* July 4th to 17th

Denman Island Summer 2010 Permaculture Design Course.

Instructor: Jesse Lemieux.

http://www.pacificpermaculture.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=112:denman-2010

Online Permaculture Calendar!

Northwest permaculture courses as well as workshops are posted at the useful, permaculture calendar:

Northwest Permaculture Events, from Bellingham to Portland.

<http://www.jocelynsevents.com/nw-permaculture/index.html>

I hope you have enjoyed this brief peek at the world of permaculture design courses. Most countries and regions of the world have similar lists. There are dozens or hundreds of permaculture design courses running worldwide at any one time. The number of pc course graduates is now approaching something like 200,000 graduates worldwide! Positive solutions for a positive future. A permaculture course is one of the best investments in the future that a person can make.