

Intro to Permaculture - Permaculture Zones Video Transcript

Music

The Permaculture zone model acts on the assumption that we give more attention to things that we see more frequently. Every site, whether it is a farm, a residence, a business, or a park has a center of human activity, the place where people spend the most amount of time. This could be the house on a site, the barn, or even the parking lot of a place where people just visit and don't live. Of course some places have multiple centers, but let's just start with one.

The center, the very center of the house, is called Zone 0, inside the house. But, the center area around the house is called Zone 1. Elements are placed in relation to this center based on how much attention they need. So things that require daily attention or are part of the systems of the structure are placed immediately outside Zone 0 in Zone 1.

Zone 1 is considered the domestic zone. Let's think about some things that require one or more visits every single day and are connected to the house. A greenhouse, a workshop, a worm bin, salad garden, kitchen herbs, poultry and other small animals just to name a few.

Zone 2 is what is thought of as the home orchard. This is still quite close to the house or other structure, so is used for domestic self-reliance. The elements in Zone 2 are higher maintenance and require regular visits. Some examples that could be found in Zone 2 are barns, animal housing, wood storage, fruit and nut trees, berries and other small fruits, vegetables, chickens, rabbits, and composting just to name a few.

Zone 3 is what we think of as the farm zone. It's visited more infrequently with more extensive methods of cultivation. This is where we might grow a cash crop of vegetables or fruits, orchards, firewoods, pasture, large ponds, hedgerows, and larger animals like cows, sheep, goats and pigs.

Zone 4 is what we think of as the forage zone. This zone has minimal care and is used more for hunting, gathering and grazing. We may harvest firewood, hunt mushrooms, wildcraft herbs, and selectively graze to reduce fuel to protect from wildfire.

Zone 5 is the wilderness, where we practice very minimal to no management. These are the places we leave to wild nature, and the most we take from them is information about how nature works, so we can then use that information to create our own cultivated ecologies. We are learning from natural patterns and processes, and mimicking them in our own systems so we can use the functionality of nature in our own life-support systems.

Now rarely do we have a site where these concentric zones really work out to be in a circular target like I've drawn. Every site is different, and it could be that you have a Zone 5 creek running right through your Zone 1. Or the soils and sunlight could dictate where you put your main garden rather than proximity to the house. But the zones give us a basis to work from; a starting place, which may not resemble this idealized pattern here.

There's also another design layer where elements sit on the border of two zones, for instance you may tend to your chickens in Zone 1, but they may forage out in the Zone 2 orchard or the Zone 3 crops. The magic of a Permaculture design is in how many beneficial relationships between these elements we can make. For instance, the chickens are fed by weeds and bugs in Zone 3, which they turn into fertilizer that is collected from their henhouse and used for the salad greens in Zone 1, which are then added to the compost, which is fed back to the chickens. Or the prunings from the Zone 2 orchard are used as fuel to heat and cook in the house, and then the ashes are returned to the orchard. How many connections can we make between elements? How can waste become food and nutrients cycled around? The web of connections is the strength of a Permaculture design.