



Becoming a Student of Permaculture

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Jim Ruen

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Any time there is fast-growing interest, there are usually any number of groups and individuals willing to share what they know. Permaculture is no different in that regard. Where it is different from some interest areas is a common set of 12 principles, as laid out by co-founder David Holmgren, that guide every certification course and its instructor.

However, just as those principles create a base, how they are interpreted can be as diverse as the background and interests of the instructor and their students.

"The official curriculum has been codified," says Mark Shepard, a long-time accredited permaculture instructor and farm-scale practitioner. "However, every single design course I have been to, including ones I co-taught, add to the curriculum with the flavor of the instructors."

Before investing in a permaculture certification or other training course, Shepard suggests asking the instructor about their application of the permaculture principles. Are they directed toward how to live life, how to grow food and fiber, or a blend of both? How does the instructor use permaculture principles in his yard or farm or life, and how long has he or she practiced?

Neither the best course nor the best book will replace studying nature itself, advises Shepard. He advocates spending time studying what is present in the natural areas around you. Consider what could be introduced to a given site, and supplement that with knowledge from advisors and books.

"You can learn from books and nature, but when the two disagree, throw out the book," says Shepard.

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