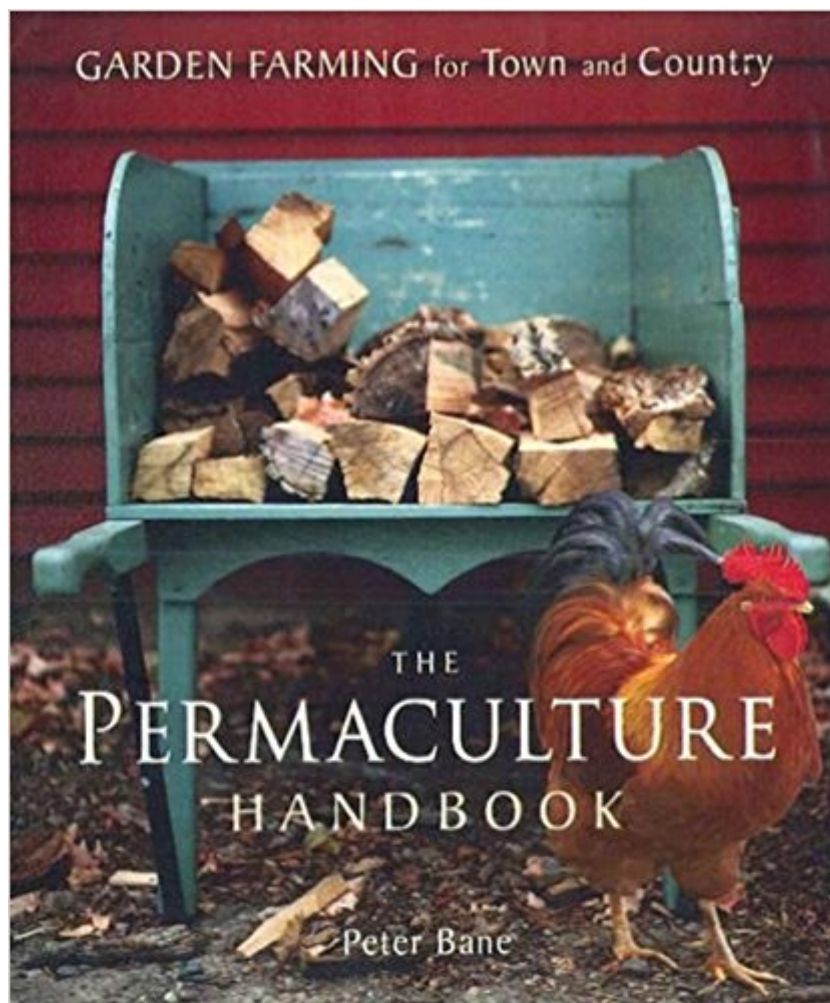


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The Permaculture Handbook: Garden Farming For Town And Country



Synopsis

The urban landscape has swallowed vast swaths of prime farmland across North America. Imagine how much more self-reliant our communities would be if thirty million acres of lawns were made productive again. Permaculture is a practical way to apply ecological design principles to food, housing, and energy systems, making growing fruits, vegetables, and livestock easier and more sustainable. The Permaculture Handbook is a step-by-step, beautifully illustrated guide to creating resilient and prosperous households and neighborhoods, complemented by extensive case studies of three successful farmsteads and market gardens. This comprehensive manual casts garden farming as both an economic opportunity and a strategy for living well with less money. It shows how, by mimicking the intelligence of nature and applying appropriate technologies such as solar and environmental design, permaculture can:

- Create an abundance of fresh, nourishing local produce
- Reduce dependence on expensive, polluting fossil fuels
- Drought-proof our cities and countryside
- Convert waste into wealth

Permaculture is about working with the earth and with each other to repair the damage of industrial overreach and to enrich the living world that sustains us. The Permaculture Handbook is the definitive practical North American guide to this revolutionary practice, and is a must-read for anyone concerned about creating food security, resilience, and a legacy of abundance rather than depletion. Peter Bane is a permaculture teacher and site designer who has published and edited Permaculture Activist magazine for over twenty years. He helped create Earthaven Ecovillage in North Carolina, and is now pioneering suburban farming in Bloomington, Indiana.

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Customer Reviews

Review - Transition Voice Vicki Lipski, July 26th

Peter Bane's handbook, while not quite encyclopedic, is nothing if not authoritative. I can honestly say, without fear of exaggeration, that I hold my head a little higher as I stride about my miniscule fiefdom, now that I've read *The Permaculture Handbook: Garden Farming for Town and Country*. The stones Bane leaves unturned are few and far between. Once you've digested the author's ruminations on mapping, patterns, and garden elements, perennials, water, soil, plants, crops, seeds, and animal husbandry, not to mention his lists of plants and the jobs to which they are best suited, there's little chance you'll walk away dissatisfied. Bane's treatment of these various aspects of garden farming (his preferred term) is methodical and complete. It was a relief and a delight to find that he allows both his sense of humor and political sensibilities to creep in from time to time. He never forgets, however, that his purpose in writing is to distill over thirty years' experience in the science and the art of permaculture. There is much to be learned. The complete novice may, in fact, find the author's thoroughness a bit blinding. In this case, a piecemeal approach could well be the best one. Bane himself advises the reader to start small, and good advice it is. As you proceed to branch out beyond the basics, the book's tidbits of information and advice will take on more and more relevance. Pass the salt! For instance, did you know that if your fruit isn't sweet, or your vegetables are the object of an insect infestation, it's probably because your soil suffers from a mineral deficiency? Your soil is in need of amending (most everybody's is, to one degree or another). It has been my contention, almost from the day we moved to the Cincinnati area, that the foods here are extremely bland. Now I understand why! The soil here is just awful; a tan, clumpy clay that is utterly devoid of worms and organic matter, and therefore completely unable to hold onto water. If it's possible to be deficient in everything, then this soil is. For folks in these parts, permaculture could literally spice up their lives. Good soil is the beginning of good eating. Here's some more great advice that, by itself, is worth the purchase price of the book. On page 88, we learn to, "keep all soil growing some crop at all times; Seed or transplant the next crop as soon as or, better, before the maturing one is harvested. This book is packed with wisdom gleaned from decades of working the soil. Assuming I get my sonic mole repeller in time (they're tunneling me out of house and home), the winter squash will go in and around my thriving tomato plants. If I can lay my hands on some more cabbage seeds, they'll go in at the same time (the first planting was a washout). With a cluck, cluck here; The animal husbandry

section offers a cornucopia of down-to-earth knowledge and advice. I've long harbored the desire to raise chickens, but here – as elsewhere – we belong to a homeowners' association, so I've been frustrated yet again. For those among you lucky enough to be able to own livestock, take a close look at chapter 14, “Animals for the Garden Farm.â • Interestingly, there are three animals which Bane believes the garden farmer should steer clear of: horses (not worth the upkeep), sheep (prone to parasites, need lots of land), and donkeys (need land). He also takes on the ethical conundrum of raising animals for meat, as well as the importance of their breeding. There is a lovely, lengthy section on beekeeping. Yet I believe this section includes a rare, important oversight; that is the failure to discuss Colony Collapse Disorder. This is just too important a problem to ignore. I hope it will be covered in the inevitable second edition. The Permaculture Handbook is liberally adorned with black and white drawings and photographs. As can sometimes be the case with garden and farming pictures, the subjects of photos are occasionally difficult to determine. This problem is further exacerbated by the fact that permaculturists (I include myself) do not necessarily pride themselves on a tidy garden farm. Everything tends to be a “work in progress,â • and it shows. Such concerns notwithstanding, the color photos are particularly well done; the numbered captions are easily understood. The photos appear to have been carefully selected, and truly do add a needed dimension that bolsters the book's authoritativeness. If they can, you can! Finally, Bane's case studies include an up-to-the minute analysis of his own Renaissance Farm, in Bloomington, Indiana (also home to the magazine The Permaculture Activist). His year-by-year history of the progress he and partner Keith Johnson have made in turning their .7 acre into a working farm makes for genuinely interesting reading. As Bane describes the endlessly cyclical nature of what they do: Self-reliance and food storage are both increasing. Soils are improving. The growing season is now year-round. Would that we could all say the same. Working examples Other operations are described, as well: Jerome's Organics, of Basalt, Colorado; Old 99 Farm, in Dundas, Ontario; and Radical Roots Farm, of Harrisonburg, Virginia. Jerome's is far and away the oldest of the four farms described, established in 1982. It's also different in that its primary mission is educational, both insofar as garden design is concerned, and with regard to producing successful yields. Jerome Osentowski welcomes students and visitors to his demonstration garden and educational programs year-round. The other two garden farms were much more recently established. In the case of Old 99 Farm, operator Ian Graham sells winter vegetables, eggs, dairy and cow-shares. Radical Roots operators Dave O'Neill and wife Lee Sturgis offer annual vegetables, nursery plants, and eggs. Dave teaches permaculture design, and consults. Lee and Dave hire paid interns, affording a valuable opportunity to up-and-coming garden

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Peter Bane: has been the publisher and editor of Permaculture Activist magazine for over 20 years. As an experienced permaculture site designer Peter has taught permaculture extensively in North and South America for nearly two decades. A prolific writer in journals and collections on forestry, building, and all things sustainable, he consults with universities and municipal governments as well as for private landowners. Peter helped create Earthaven Ecovillage in North Carolina, and is now pioneering suburban farming in Bloomington, Indiana.

You could do worse than treat this book as a comprehensive update of the "technique" material in Mollison's "Permaculture: A Designer's Manual". There's a lot of value, a lot of practical wisdom and a lot of updated science (soil science, agronomy, ecology, human and animal nutrition) in this big book. The comparatively recent technique of a pattern language as a further aid to design is also a welcome addition. Naturally, zones, sectors, stacking, succession and the rest of the thinking tools are still here as well. It's fascinating to see Permaculture insights elaborated and developed in a second generation literature. Helpful, too. The reference point is the urban-fringe "garden farm", producing foods for its occupants, neighbours and local markets, rather than Mollison's upland valley-scale farmstead or hamlet. But it has always been clear that Permaculture aspirations and techniques apply at scales from apartment balconies to broad-acre farms. I guess I can't complain about a North American perspective on climate, species, etc. Much of Mollison's work was very Australian-centric. But it would be an improvement in the Permaculture literature generally to get global. Mollison and Holmgren tended towards language like "pole-wards" instead of South for the shady side, and international climate type classifications instead of national ones. They weren't fully consistent, and sometimes the language gets awkward, but I think it's an effort worth making. This book would benefit. Don't know what I'm talking about? Want to get an overview of what this Permaculture thing is? Don't start here. There are short, accessible books that introduce you to the body of thought and practice that this book covers in comprehensive detail. If you've read those and want the full Monty, this is one of the very best. Disclaimer: I'm not an accredited Permaculture designer/practitioner/teacher/whatever. The official side doesn't do much for me. Permaculture is a body of ideas, aspirations and techniques for land care/land use that I've danced with ever since I

heard Mollison speak at a camp in the Australian bush in 1974.

I ordered this book because I have recently been fascinated with the subject. I ordered this book as my first Permaculture book, after reading all of the positive reviews, because many of the other must-reads on the subject are out of print or prohibitively expensive. This book has a wealth of information on Permaculture but is pretty heavy on doom and gloom worldview as well. Don't believe the cute rooster on the cover. A light, how-to on getting started with backyard Permaculture this is not. While there's a place in any book on Permaculture to lay out the many reasons why it is the best practice for our future, this book presents one predominant assumption: that a shortage of fossil fuels WILL eventually force us all to live in a much simpler manner, similar to the way our ancestors lived 100 years ago. This assumption carries throughout the rest of the book and describes strategies for completely reinventing society to deal with the fact that we won't have transportation or be able to ship anything the way we do now. All the strategies, both for the actual agricultural aspects and the larger issues of culture in general, assume that this is very plausible and imminent. That's all well and good as a component for consideration in *a section* of a book purportedly on growing food, but when it's presented heavily throughout the remainder, it begins to look like a tinfoil hat kind of thing. A good subtitle for the book would be: "How to use Permaculture in navigating society after the fossil fuel collapse". While I think this is absolutely a possibility, I don't think we have any idea how technology may postpone or even completely remove the threat of societal collapse due to fossil fuel dry-up. With this view, one would think that each technological advance "hurts the cause" of Permaculture because it pushes back the date of collapse a little further. But then, maybe this one potential threat to our future isn't the *only* compelling reason to put Permaculture into practice. What if technology *does* make the fossil fuel shortage irrelevant? (The horse manure crisis of earlier centuries was averted with steam power). If the fossil fuel problem were solved with some improbable, cold-fusionish, Star Trek-style solution, we still have the problems of soil degradation, damage to the atmosphere, the relegation of farming to industry, corporate control of our food production, as well as the heavy use of chemicals and genetic engineering. Also, what about things like self-reliance, the joy of growing your own sustainable food, helping the needy, and eating more healthfully? These are all considerations that make Permaculture appealing to *me* and don't require me to jump on the apocalyptic band wagon (yet). All of these ideas are mentioned and considered in the book, but they take a major back seat to the "I Am Legend" aspect of Bane's Permaculture. I still really enjoy the book for what it is. It has great illustrations, and there's a lot of great material on the actual growing of things and system designs.

The other reviews on these aspects of the book I believe to be fair. I think this book would be much more palatable to the "idiot masses" like myself who aren't yet on board with Bane's view of our near future by including strategies for coping with collapse in a *section* of the book dedicated to that topic. Instead, topics like "redesigning your home to accommodate boarding guest workers you'll need to farm your once-suburban property after collapse" are thrown in throughout the book as if that's a very casual consideration. I wouldn't feel comfortable sharing this book with friends who aren't already into permaculture as I feel that it would alienate them. Don't believe the happy rooster!*****

*****May 2014 update: I've since acquired my own copy of Mollison'sÂ Permaculture: A Designers' ManualÂ and am still an avid fan of permaculture. I'm currently enrolled in Geoff Lawton's online Permaculture Design Course. (I think it's absolutely worth every penny of the high cost by the way.) I say all of that just to point out that I'm not just a pedestrian reader re. permaculture who's posting a marginally negative review. Permaculture will be a major part of the rest of my life. I still agree with what I stated in the original review. My issues with it are probably *more* pronounced having studied the subject more. You see, what really attracted me (and still does) to permaculture is how overwhelmingly *positive* it is. The world's problems are talked about everywhere, but there aren't many *solutions* offered anywhere. Permaculture is about solutions, and I don't think that any of the world's problems are addressed more fully than in the study of permaculture. The Design Manual by Mollison, itself, addresses these problems in a realistic way but is overwhelmingly positive. Also, it addresses more broadly that life is better when holistically practicing the principles of permaculture because of its benefit *now*, in addition to addressing concerns re. the future.

A treasury of good, useful information here, including concise and useful descriptions of each of the twelve principles, but many subsequent passages simply allude to key practices, almost parenthetically, referring you to farther on in the book for explanations, and this makes it a bit tough to follow.

The author not only writes about this way of life but also lives it. He also tells the various stories in a clear understandable way. Plus the author has many You-tube videos to also help you see, hear and understand his message. If you have any doubt as to whether you want to purchase this book, just watch a few of his online videos. I'm sure you will have no doubts about purchasing this book. He is also a permaculture landscape architect.

Excellent read. Written so we can personally identify with permaculture examples and bring them into our lives. Based on the Pattern Language system which makes it easy to choose relevant patterns and then design from them. Lots of specifics, outcomes, consequences. We highly recommend it and already bought one for a family member!

A very inspiring read. It runs a little long in places but definitely covers a lot of ground. I'm trying to convince my wife that we should work toward the goal of a family farm.

This is some really great work from a permaculture elder, Peter Bane. The focus is on the suburban expression of permaculture, which is probably where the majority of practitioners find themselves. However the title might lead one to think it is a more comprehensive approach, which it is not. Thus the four stars rather than five.

Awesome information, lame illustrations

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