



Executive Summary

Forest gardens are an increasingly popular practice for providing a variety of products in an ecologically integrated way. This is a discipline led by practitioners, with little systematic research into, or review of, this practice until very recently. Such research is necessary if forest gardens are to fulfil their full potential as one of the ways to address the many challenges we are facing in the 21st century and beyond.

In order to address this gap, the Permaculture Association embarked on a participatory trial program in 2010. The trial aimed to observe ten forest gardens over the first 10 years of their establishment. Our aim was to investigate the ecological, economic and social benefits of forest gardens, and to share these lessons with in permaculture, research culture and the wider community.

An initial meeting with participants was held in 2011, and reviews in 2014, 2016 and 2021 captured the progress of trial sites and participants in year 3 and 5 and after the end of the 10-year period. The final review also included an additional five sites that had been established for a longer time, in order to provide a comparison of younger and older sites.

The main outcomes of this study are:

- A typology of forest gardens that has informed subsequent research
- Design recommendations for forest gardeners
- Findings about the biodiversity, crop diversity and economic potential of forest gardens
- Lessons for the process of participatory research into forest gardens

The results of this trial show the potential of forest gardens to contribute to a number of challenges we are facing as a society, in particular with regard to biodiversity and food self-reliance. Additionally they highlight both the potential of participatory citizen science in understanding new forms of land use and some of the steps needed to use this approach to its full effect. We hope that others will be able to build on the results and lessons of this trial through further citizens science research into forest gardens.