



## **Introduction to Permaculture (Award): Core Curriculum**

### **V1.1 (2020)**

#### **Introduction**

The curriculum presented here describes the content that must be included in a Introduction to Permaculture (Intro) course, if a certificate from the Permaculture Association (Britain) is to be awarded.<sup>1</sup>

Introduction to Permaculture courses can and should be taught using a variety of formats and *timetables, to meet different needs for a variety of audiences.*

*The curriculum presented here describes the content that should be included in an Introduction to Permaculture course, if a certificate from the Permaculture Association is to be awarded - as an Introduction to Permaculture Award.*

*This document can also be used as a guide to teaching Introduction to Permaculture courses that are not certified by the Permaculture Association.*

A minimum of 6 hours of contact time is required between teacher and student for an Introduction to Permaculture Award certificate to be awarded. In this period it is impossible that all of the topics outlined herein will be covered thoroughly. However, an introductory level of detail can be entered into and it is good practice to signpost students to additional learning or researching to pursue in their own time.

This curriculum draws on the Permaculture Association's internationally recognised PDC curriculum, which in turn builds on the 'Permaculture: a Designers' Manual' by Bill Mollison. It is designed to address the British context, although it is intended to have relevance more widely than Britain. It has been approved in 2020 by the Education Working Group (EWG) of the Permaculture Association (Britain), and will be updated in the future by the EWG.

This document states the essential topics that must be included in a Permaculture Association approved Introduction to Permaculture Award, and includes optional topics *in italics*. It does

not include a comprehensive list of subjects that an Introduction to Permaculture could include; courses will often include other subjects (especially skills and practice based learning) and may be shaped around a specific theme, project or group of people, or draw on the expertise of the teacher and students in a particular field.

This document includes a small amount of guidance on how to teach an Introduction to Permaculture course, although it is also recommended that teachers find inspiration from sources such as the 'Permaculture Teachers' Guide' and 'Teaching Permaculture Creatively' (see Appendices for References), or the certified Training of Teachers (ToT) course. The expectation is that before leading an Introduction to Permaculture course teachers will have co-taught a course with a more experienced certified teacher leading the course.

**For online certified Introduction to Permaculture Award courses** – tutors will need to pay particular attention to the delivery of the course. You will need to record on your curriculum document how and when the following points are addressed in your course:

- ◆ **Skills, Tools & methods:** provide each student with an introductory understanding and ability to apply this prior to moving on to the next topic
- ◆ **Design Exercise / Taster:** use a short design exercise to enable students to develop their understanding of permaculture as a design discipline
- ◆ **Examples of Permaculture in Practice:** Ideally, identify local sites and promote or arrange visits for students. Present a video or slide show that presents a good example of permaculture in practice

#### **Requirements and experience for teaching the Certified Introduction Course**

- Certified Introduction educators must be on the PAB certified teachers register
- Have co-taught on 2 Certified Introduction courses led by an existing Certified Introduction teacher

#### **Who can take the course? Entry requirements and experience to take the Certified Introduction Course**

There are no entry requirements for participants taking a Certified Introduction course.

#### **Minimum teaching time for the course?**

Minimum of 1 day / 6 hours of teaching time to cover the Certified Introduction curriculum.

#### **Accessibility & Equity Guidance**

Teaching of the Certified Introduction course should take account of current good practice and guidance from PAB on inclusivity and accessibility.

#### **Certified Introduction Curriculum Oversight**

This curriculum has been created by and is overseen by the Education Working Group (Britain) and will be reviewed on a 2 yearly basis, and updated as needed.

#### **Online, In-Person or Blended Delivery**

The Certified Introduction can be taught In-person, Online or in a Blended format that combines in-person or online. In each situation the quality of the course depends on how you manage the course culture.

If taught online or blended the online Certified Introduction element must be taught as a live online course, not a recorded self-study course. Online self-study resources can be used as a supplement to the live online course material.

### **How you will be teaching the Certified Introduction**

Educators applying to teach the Certified Introduction course will need to submit a teaching plan that adequately describes how they will be teaching the Certified Introduction curriculum.

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## **The Curriculum**

### **Recommended Learning Objectives:**

At the end of the course learners will:

- Understand what permaculture is and where it comes from
- Understand the value of the ethics & principles of permaculture
- Understand the interconnected nature of all systems (natural, economic, human) and the need to care for them
- Understand the value of using a permaculture design process and permaculture design tools and a range of situations for which they can be applied

### **By the end of this course, students will know about:**

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#### **1. Context**

- ◆ The Prime Directive of Permaculture: "The only ethical decision is to take responsibility for our own existence and that of our children." - Bill Mollison.
- ◆ Why permaculture?
- ◆ What is permaculture? (including definitions)
- ◆ Permaculture as an approach to designing systems which meet human needs.

*Many teachers also include:*

- ◆ *A brief history of permaculture*
- ◆ *Permaculture and climate change*
- ◆ *Permaculture as regenerative design*

#### **2. Ethics**

- ◆ Earth Care
- ◆ People Care
- ◆ Fair Shares / Future Care ("*setting limits to population and consumption*")

*Essentially permaculture teachers agree to teach the discipline respecting ethical values.*

*Many teachers include:*

- *examples of how they are applied in practice.*
- *ask at the outset, why students are on the course*

### 3. Principles

#### A choice of either Mollison or Holmgren:

At least one set of principles should be used in more detail in the course, although it should be made clear that there are more than one set of principles, which provide tried and tested approaches. In particular: The Mollison Principles and The Holmgren Principles.

Individual principles should be discussed at an appropriate introductory level, often with just a small number of principles explored in more depth.

#### 3.1 Mollison Principles

##### 3.1.1 Attitudinal Principles:

- ◆ Work with nature, not against
- ◆ The problem is the solution (Liabilities into assets)
- ◆ Make the least change for the greatest possible effect

Many teachers also include:

- ◆ *The yield of a system is theoretically unlimited*
- ◆ *Everything Gardens (or has an effect on its environment)*

##### 3.1.2 Ecological Principles - normally introduce at least 3 of the following::

- ◆ Cycling of energy, nutrients & resources
- ◆ Every element performs multiple functions (multi-function)
- ◆ Every function is supported by multiple elements (multi-supply)
- ◆ Succession
- ◆ Edge effects

Teachers may also include two or three of the following, or other relevant principles:

- ◆ *Stacking in space and time; .*
- ◆ *Diversity: including guilds.*
- ◆ *Efficient energy planning (e.g. zone, sector, slope).*
- ◆ *Microclimate / Niches*
- ◆ *Start at the backdoor and work outwards.*
- ◆ *Relative location - place elements to maximise beneficial relationships.*
- ◆ *Biological resources*

#### 3.2 The Holmgren Principles



1. Observe & interact



2. Catch & store energy



3. Obtain a yield



4. Apply self-regulation & accept feedback



5. Use & value renewable resources & services



6. Produce no waste



7. Design from patterns to details



8. Integrate rather than segregate



9. Use small & slow solutions



10. Use & value diversity



11. Use edges & value the marginal



12. Creatively use & respond to change

Teachers may also want to introduce the [Holmgren Flower](#).

#### 3.3 Applications of Permaculture

Teachers should normally provide several examples that indicate that permaculture design can be applied from many different perspectives e.g.: Energy Management; People Care; Landscape Design; Pattern understanding

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## 4. Design

### 4.1 Process Frameworks: teach 1 as an example

- ◆ e.g. SADIM / OBREDIMET / other.

### 4.2 Skills, Tools & methods:

At least 3 design tools or methods should be used from:

- ◆ **Observation (essential)**
- ◆ Patterns
- ◆ Zones, sectors, slope (energies in the landscape)
- ◆ Input/output analysis

Some teachers may also include the following at an appropriate introductory level:

- ◆ *Research; Maps & Surveying; Relative location; Client Interview; Plants, animals, structures, tools/technologies, events (PASTE); Plus, Minus, Interesting (PMI) evaluation tool; Removal of Limiting factors; Wild design*

### 4.3 Design Exercise / Design Taster

An opportunity to experience the design process or practice basic design skills during the course as a participatory exercise should normally be included (e.g. 30-60 minutes exercise). This would often be a (whole or small) group exercise, although could be an individual exercise for example if the course is delivered as evening classes over an extended period, or as an online / blended learning course. The subject normally should be relevant to the course venue and / or participants e.g. forest garden; school garden design; garden design.

Students might be asked to briefly share the result of the exercise and their experience of the exercise with the course group.

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## 5. Themes

The following topics normally should be covered at an introductory level, not at a detailed level, as themes that often will be addressed through design that combines strategies and methods.

**Land and ecological systems:** Zone 0-5; ecological resilience or "design for the outer landscape"; The importance of vibrant, well-connected ecosystems.

- **Soil:** Living soil; Composting; Mulching
  - Other optional topics that might be included at a basic level include: *Soil sampling; Mycorrhizal and bacterial associations; Fertility factors*
- **Water:** Water availability, use and efficiency; Rainwater harvesting
  - Other optional topics that might be included at a basic level include: *Retention in the landscape; Drainage; Aquaculture*
- **Plants/trees:** Plant categories and communities: *e.g. tree species, perennials, native & exotic, and uses, nitrogen fixers/fertility plants*; Forest gardening
  - Other optional topics that might be included at a basic level include: *Indicator plants; Guilds and other ways of looking at plant co-operation*
- **Growing your own food:** permaculture and organic gardening; bed creation; seasonal planning

- Other optional topics that might be included at a basic level include: *animals in the system; broadscale agriculture; hugelkultur*

**Social systems and the personal context:** Zone 00: personal resilience or "design for the inner landscape"; The importance of vibrant, well-connected community *e.g. transition towns etc;* Health & wellbeing\*

- Other optional topics that might be included at a basic level include: *Communication skills and group work; Decision making (e.g. consensus) & Sociocracy*

**Other topics that might be included:**

*Other optional topics might be included at an introductory level include:*

- *Climate change - permaculture strategies & methods for positive climate action*
- *Built environment e.g. Ecological building; Retrofitting; Renewable energy sources and management*
- *Resource use: ecological and carbon footprints; resource types and resource choices*

**6. Next Steps & Further Information**

The next steps after an Introduction to Permaculture course should be covered, which normally would be likely to include:

- ◆ Options for undertaking your own permaculture design project.
- ◆ Introduction to the Permaculture Association (Britain) and why/how to become a member.
- ◆ Permaculture Design Certificate course
- ◆ *Establishing/linking with local groups*
- ◆ *Setting up action local permaculture groups e.g. 'permablitz' etc*

**7. Feedback**

Course participants should be given the opportunity to provide feedback about the course to the tutors.

**8. Teaching / Facilitation Process**

Recommendations (rather than requirements):

- Hosting at or visiting site(s) which demonstrate and exemplify permaculture principles.
- Activities before and / or after the course:
  - Preparing the ground for learning
  - Creating opportunities to reinforce and apply the learning
- Present at least one good example of permaculture in practice e.g. video; slide show; website photo gallery (this could be part of preparing the ground for learning)
- Mixed methods (learning styles)
  - Use a number of games within the course e.g. web of life game
  - Participatory sessions working in smaller groups
- Practical - include at least one practical if possible
- Useful resources: video list; reading list; free downloads list; website list; handouts;

**9. Recommended References:**

For teachers:

- The Permaculture Teachers Handbook, Permaculture Association (Britain), W/WF and Permanent Publications
- Earth Users Guide To Teaching Permaculture, Rosemary Morrow
- Teaching Permaculture Creatively, Robin Clayfield and Skye
- Complete the certified 'ToT' Training of Teachers course (particularly if you plan to teach both Introductory courses and PDCs)

For students:

- Essentials of Permaculture, David Holmgren - free download available in multiple languages from: <https://permacultureprinciples.com/resources/free-downloads/>
- Knowledge Base of the Permaculture Association <https://knowledgebase.permaculture.org.uk/>

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## Background to this document

This curriculum was produced by the members of the Education Working Group, a voluntary group of members of the Permaculture Association, and Educator Members of the association, contributing their time on a voluntary basis.

### **DISCLAIMER:**

This document is for use by teachers intending to certify a Permaculture Association Introduction to Permaculture course. It makes no statement regarding the relative quality of any other introduction to permaculture curriculum, or the suitability of other curricula for any given context.

The Permaculture Association can accept no responsibility for the quality or content of courses that are certified by other organisations.