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Perma-what? Permaculture: gardening with nature in mind

Do you want to make your home and veggie garden more productive, efficient and fun, and save money doing it? And how about making a more positive impact on your environment and community?

Maybe it's time to try permaculture: garden design based on natural ecosystems.

Permaculture creates garden systems that are ecologically-sound and economically viable, according to Rosemary Morrow, author of the *Earth User's Guide to Permaculture*.

Need help getting started? Permaculturist Derek Jean and permaculture design consultant Elaine Codling will run an **Introduction to Permaculture** workshop Saturday, Jan. 26 as part of the *Lettuce Grow* series at North Island College.

The course will address principles of permaculture, ecological design, observation and recognition of natural patterns, practical garden tips and more – all in an inspiring one-day workshop. Participants will also receive a free copy of permaculture magazine and a 25 per cent discount on all book orders placed during the workshop.

Workshop fee is \$55 for a six-hour session. To register, visit <http://www.nic.bc.ca/continuingeducation/> and search for course GENI 7932 or call 250-923-9724 for more information.

Can't wait to get your hands dirty? Try making an herb spiral, the poster child project of permaculture-inspired gardening. The spiral design maximizes yield in minimal space with minimal effort, by using vertical space and creating multiple microclimates suitable for a variety of herbs.

Here's how:

1. Choose the herbs you want to have in your spiral. For example, from top to bottom, you could plant: rosemary, oregano, thyme, borage, sage, lemon verbena, yarrow, Mexican tarragon, anise hyssop, chives, basil, calendula and stevia. You could also add echinacea, chamomile, St. John's wort, caraway, parsley, cilantro, dill or any other herb.
2. Plan each herb's location in the spiral according to its needs for sun, shade and moisture (east side gets morning sun and afternoon shade; west side gets morning shade and afternoon sun; and the top of the spiral will be driest).
3. Locate the spiral as close to the kitchen as possible because you're more likely to use it that way. Place a piece of cardboard up to five feet wide on the area you choose to create your herb spiral. With a pencil, draw the spiral outline on the cardboard. Make it no more than five feet wide to ensure you can gather herbs from the centre.
4. Place bricks or rocks along your outline. Remember to slowly increase the stacking height until the centre reaches about three feet high. It is useful to employ help at this point!
5. Fill the herb spiral with compost soil. Most herbs don't need a lot of extra soil amendments here.
6. Wet soil thoroughly, and plant each herb in its correct spot. When plants grow big enough, add mulch around them.

Like this article? Want to hear more? Have a workshop to suggest? Write us your questions and requests to growlocal@campbellriver.ca.

Lettuce Grow courses and this article series support the implementation of the City's Agriculture Plan and the community sustainability goal of local food self-sufficiency and resiliency.

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Photo: This herb spiral at Spring Ridge Commons in Victoria is an example of permaculture gardening, which maximizes yield in a small amount of space. Photo courtesy of Kira DeSorcy.