

PERMACULTURE

Sustainable farming

Vivienne Haldane

PERMACULTURE is not just about being self sufficient and living off the land, but is a whole plan of living and farming in which the goal is to reduce waste: energy, materials, human and environmental. Permaculture works on solutions that benefit, not deplete, the natural environment and communities so both continue to thrive. It's a holistic approach to living that may in the future become more and more necessary.

Jo Duff laughs when Farm Focus asked for her definition of permaculture, "There are as many different definitions as there are permaculturalists. It is working out sustainable ways to farm; growing your own food, developing a sense of community and local economy, so they are strong and resilient to outside pressures. "It's a design science that teaches principles you can apply in different situations, but as each situation will be different, so there are no hard and fast rules," she said.

Jo and Aaron Duff's 16 acre property at Poukawa near Hastings, could be considered a blank canvas for

these two enthusiastic practitioners of permaculture to make their mark on.

'It's really just common-sense'

A freshly landscaped driveway cuts a bold swathe, like arms outstretched, to the crest of the hill where the Duff's temporary, but cosy shelter is sited. Inside, shelves are lined with books on the subjects closest to their hearts and nearby, a computer that runs solar battery power. The Duff's are off the national electricity grid and intend to stay that way. "We operate on solar power,

from two 160 watt solar panels and have a wind turbine of 300 watts," adds Jo.

So what does the future picture look like for Jo and Aaron on their property?

Living at Poukawa for two years has given them the opportunity to work out their long term plan in relation to the natural elements; such as the prevailing winds, direction of the sun, wet areas and associated run off.

Jo says, "Permaculture is about designing and putting systems in place that make things as easy as possible. For example, make the design of your garden, farm or house, as energy efficient in terms of fossil fuels and of yourself. Things that you use regularly and that are high maintenance need to be close to the house (salad

plants and herbs, chickens and small animals), whereas things you don't need so regularly, further away. It's really just common sense," she said. Plans are in place for an energy efficient house made from straw bales and earth plaster. The house site has already been chosen for its maximum sun direction.

Rainwater will be collected from the roof and a system of 'grey water' (waste water from showers and washing) will conserve every available drop of water and will be collected and used on gardens and trees.

Further proof that nothing is wasted; excavated earth from the driveway has been stored, for future use as a shelter bank behind the new house.

Shelter belt trees have recently been planted and other wooded areas will provide firewood for the wood burner in cooler months.

Garden beds are heavily mulched with straw or hay throughout the year to combat weeds and retain soil moisture. Compost heaps are often made on top of a bed and dug directly in when ready.

Green crops such as mustard, lupins and oats are grown during the winter months and then dug in to provide nutrition for the spring planting.

Jo says, "We also want to develop a community supported agriculture scheme, whereby people pay up front at the beginning of the year so the farmer has a budget to work on. The crop is grown and the consumer then gets a share of the yield. This is popular in Britain, the United States and Europe (known as subscription agriculture)

but is quite a radical concept here."

Jo and Aaron will sell what is grown on their property and barter for food they don't have. The goal is to be self sufficient but within a network of people.

Jo says, "I don't think there is a huge value in being self sufficient just for yourself and ignoring other people."

Jo says, "The locals call us greenies. It didn't help that we put a tepee up when we first arrived, but people are really interested and supportive of what we are doing."



Permaculturalist, Jo Duff of Poukawa

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