

DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

Full-life living

BY SIOUX ROGERS

Right up front, my shameful apologies for using this column to rearrange my brain cells. Gardening, even for the simplest of posies, is not always so simple. Like, do you know why a marigold is never purple? I don't! Ok, so who really cares? Grandma certainly didn't.

Now, because I loathe to be left behind, here is an entirely new vocabulary for the chic gardener. Hence my latest educational focus. Anyhow, some of you at least must be tired of the "touchy-feely" stuff.

Do you have a clear focus and uncluttered understanding of "xeriscape," "sustainable agriculture," and "permaculture"? The more I read, the more overlap I see in the philosophical meanings and viewpoints.

Wikipedia is often my step-off spot for definitions. So let's begin with "Xeriscape" per Wikipedia: "... landscaping in ways that do not require supplemental irrigation. It is promoted in areas that do not have easily accessible supplies of fresh water..." The root word "xeros" actually means "dry" in Greek. Even though the definition refers to water needs and the availability of water that, at least for me, is not substantive or inclusive of the entire scope of "xeriscape." First, all new plantings need water until established. If, "well, duh" is your response, good! At least, that was easily clarified. Most of the plants used by the landscape architects and promoters of xeriscaping are quite similar; that is, per a given region, such as our Pacific Northwest, compared to say southern Florida or Iowa or Boulder, Colorado. As a very brief example, consider for our area abella, artemesia, buddleia, lavender,



Laying out the water garden.

rosemary, ribus and rosa rugosa. These same plants could be used in other areas, but differently, perhaps as a treasured houseplant. A reverse example might be the jade plant, which grows all year long with minimal water and care in southern California. In a colder climate, it is a coveted houseplant.

A basis for successful xeriscaping is to begin with the fauna natural to that area. That part is easy; check with your local extension service. For more elaborate landscaping, it is necessary to do research on what grows well in the "zone" where you live.

When maintaining xeriscape design, it is essential that plants be

grouped together by similar watering conditions. I personally am falling in love with some beautiful succulents that, after enjoying a snow-covered nap, come forth smiling in the spring. But I would not plant them in the shade with thirsty hydrangeas. Two other important points for maintaining a xeriscape landscape: (1) Water when the plants need it, i.e. they look droopy, and (2) Mulch heavily and appropriately wherever you can. This last suggestion is how I justify coveting thirsty hydrangeas. I plant them in shade in very humus soil with an abundance of mulch. I rarely need to water them.

Next, "permaculture" and "sustainable agriculture" philosophically and practically sound related, although are given different Wikipedia definitions and not lumped together.

"The word permaculture, coined by Australian Bill Mollison and his student David Holmgren during the 1970s, is a portmanteau of 'permanent agriculture' as well as 'permanent culture.' This last phrase, 'permanent agriculture,' a workable philosophy was first developed by Franklin Hiram King in 1911. The only ethical decision is to take responsibility for our own existence and that of our children." (Mollison, 1990) Mollison has been teaching and speaking, and is the philosophical disciple of King's original work.

In his book Introduction to Permaculture: Concepts and Resources, Steve Diver says, "A central theme in permaculture is the design of ecological landscapes that produce food. Emphasis is placed on multi-use plants, cultural practices such as sheet mulching and trellising, and the integration of animals to recycle nutrients and graze weeds.

"However, permaculture entails much more than just food production. Energy-efficient buildings, wastewater treatment, recycling, and land stewardship in general are other important components of permaculture. More recently,

permaculture has expanded its purview to include economic and social structures that support the evolution and development of more permanent communities...

"Sustainable agriculture refers to the ability of a farm to produce food indefinitely, without causing severe or irreversible damage to ecosystem health. Two key issues are biophysical (the long-term effects of various practices on soil properties and processes essential for crop productivity) and socio-economic (the long-term ability of farmers to obtain inputs and manage resources such as labor).

The physical aspects of sustainability are only partly understood. Practices



Credits: All photographs from Midwest Permaculture.

that can cause long-term damage to soil include excessive tillage (leading to erosion) and irrigation without adequate drainage (leading to accumulation of salt in the soil)." (Source: Wikipedia.) Notice the overlapping definition with permaculture.

In 1990 FACTA (Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act) also addressed sustainable agriculture as the following:

- "Satisfy human food and fiber needs
- Enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends
- Make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls
- Sustain the economic viability of farm operations
- Enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole."

Whether it be thousands of commercial acres, a small family-run farm or a private garden, one must practice responsible long-term, not shortsighted, ecological community maintenance. This bespeaks to me of local farmers' markets, growing your own food, bartering local food for local goods and services, and being vigilant not to purchase products made in, say China, rather than local or at least in the United States. I call this consciousness "full-life living."

Xeriscape, sustainable agriculture, permaculture and the vagueness of edible landscaping is as much about land stewardship as it is about social and economical community integration and sustainability. There is nothing in nature that does only one thing.

For the Love of Dirt
Sioux Rogers
541-846-7736
mumearth@apbb.net

"For the love of dirt, can you tell me...?"

1. Q: Is this the time to feed and trim my roses? They look awful. RJ, Ashland

A: In this climate (zone 7 on the USDA chart), most all roses look awful in winter, especially if the weather is its usual cold. Many years ago I was told never to prune my roses until the last frost was gone. For me, at 1,400-foot elevation with skimpy sun exposure, that means Memorial Day. A few years ago a friend who lives a few hills away in the Rogue Valley, said she always prunes her roses on St. Patrick's Day. She came over and pruned all my roses! I saw no difference in their health or flowering. This earlier date seems to be the recommended norm for the Rogue Valley.

Another indication as to when to prune is when the buds start to swell. Also, I heard it is time to prune your roses when the forsythia are in bloom.

So experiment and see which works for your exposure, elevation, frost date and type of roses you grow.

2. Q: I am brand new to the gardening world. I am embarrassed to ask, but what is the difference between an "annual" and a "perennial"? CM, Jacksonville

A: Let me answer this very easily and simply. No need to be embarrassed. Think of annual as once a year. An annual, once again depending on the weather, usually has a short life cycle beginning with planting a seed in late winter or early spring. The plant "does its thing" of producing a flower, edible (broccoli) or non-edible (lobelia), then is gone, as in dead, when the weather once again is too cold. Annuals can be started indoors or in hot houses in late winter or very early spring. Many people just buy their annuals at the local nursery.

Perennials have a much longer life cycle than an annual. Some last for many, many years, some for several. Often perennials "die" down to the ground just for the winter. They really have just gone to sleep or become dormant. In spring or early summer, they are refreshed and come back bigger and better.

Hope these very brief responses clarify a few of the wonderful mystics of gardening. For the love of dirt, keep the questions coming. mumearth@apbb.net