

# BLUE MOUNTAINS PERMACULTURE NETWORK

## SPRING NEWSLETTER 2003

Hello

Thank you all for your helpful response to the Winter Newsletter and for your contributions to this one. Apologies to Richard Lee, I am unable to access your comments on David Holgren's talk as I have just changed computers with the inevitable casualties. I hope to be able to include this in the Summer newsletter.

Spring! Now seeming to be a season of contradictions - no rain, fires and snow on the one day. For me a test to my ideas of living close to nature. I have developed a huge respect for farmers after the cockatoos ate my mandarins and started on the oranges and lemons, and the possums grazed on the parsley, coriander, silverbeet and lettuces having learnt to climb the fence. I felt a little kinder when it was pointed out that the bush was very dry and I just need to be cleverer.

Pat

BMPN

## WHAT'S ON?

- |                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| Saturday 4 October -   | Open Day Hawkesbury EarthCare Centre 12 noon<br>Building your own Mudbrick house (talk)   |
| Saturday 4 October     | ECOhomes TOUR A guided bus tour of Upper Mountains 'green' homes - using earth, straw and recycled timber construction. Phone 4782 5375 or <a href="http://www.ecosmart-house.com.au/tour">www.ecosmart-house.com.au/tour</a> |
| Tuesday 14 October     | Inaugural Annual Bird Week Lecture - Olympians of the Wetlands Sydney (see attachment for further information)  |
| Friday 17 October 7 pm | Biodiversity Dinner Discussion<br>Contact Jasmine Payget on 4780 5739   |
| Friday 24 October 7 pm | Accredited Permaculture Training -<br>Public seminar in Katoomba<br>Contact Richard Griffiths phone 4784 2046<br>e-mail: <a href="mailto:info@permanentculture.com">info@permanentculture.com</a>                             |
| Saturday 1 November    | OPEN DAY Hawkesbury EarthCare Centre - 12 noon  |

Waterwise gardening for summer

- Saturday 8 November "Greening your home" - A course in sustainable living designed by the EPA. To be presented in partnership with the Hawkesbury Community College (terms 3 & 4) enquiries Eric Brocken phone 4567 8424
- Sunday 16 November "Mid Mountains Seed Savers - 2783" meeting  
Phone Loret 4759 2118
- Tuesday 25 November 8:30 - 5:30 "Fostering Sustainable Behaviour" with Doug McKenzie Mohr, a Canadian environmental psychologist  
Contact Peter Shmigel of Nolan-ITU,  
[pshmigel@nolanitu.com.au](mailto:pshmigel@nolanitu.com.au) (see attachment)

## Announcing National Recognition for Permaculture Training

'At the cutting edge of education for sustainability.'

Public Seminar Friday 24th October

You are invited to a public seminar to introduce Accredited Permaculture Training, a new program of permaculture education, developed by Permaculture International Ltd under the Australian Qualifications Training Framework.

This marks a major milestone, not only for the national and international permaculture movement, but for environmental education in Australia.

Accredited Permaculture Training (APT) will provide nationally recognised qualifications in permaculture, Certificates I to IV and Diploma, which will open new opportunities in training and employment in the diverse fields of permaculture applications from basic organic gardening skills, seed saving, garden and farm design, through to bioregional and community development, ecovillage design and urban strategies.

Robyn Francis, leading international permaculture consultant will be visiting Katoomba on an East Coast Tour presenting information seminars about the new training package.

Friday 24th October, 7pm, Katoomba, venue to be confirmed.

For more details contact:

Richard Griffiths 47842046  
e-mail: [info@permanentculture.com](mailto:info@permanentculture.com)

## ***Drought: swales and blackberries***

*by Rosemary Morrow*

**Story One:** I've been watching the discussing on the Permaculture list-serv about swales. The discussion is about slope and soil types. However, one thing coming through so clearly is that swales are extremely effective in getting water soaking into the land and the results show up as:

- greener areas
- newly planted trees requiring less watering
- greater survival of all species
- damper and less wind

these are pretty attractive outcomes for a simple technique especially when the rains are little and unpredictable.

Received PC wisdom say that you don't need to use swales if the soils are stable, the slope is stable and not too great.

**Story Two:** I had about 1/3 acre covered with blackberry and I decided to remove it all by hand. I started classically by working around the less infested outer areas. It wasn't too arduous as I studied the whole physiology and psychology of blackberry. I enjoy working on the slope. However the crucial feature was the light weight mattock I used, to dig out the roots - using it as a lever.

I left lots of little pitted holes all over the dry barren, but stable slope. Today, seven years later, and I go over it every year, that part of the slope has:

- good black soils
- greater success with plant survival
- damp soil where everywhere else is dry.

This pitted area is immeasurably better than any other part of that land.

**So what does this mean?** It means, that even if you don't have enough land to make swales, or the land appear stable, that swales, or pitting along the contours as I have done, has an enormous effect on holding water, rebuilding soils, and improving growth of everything.

My recommendation is that we all get out and make swales or pits, everywhere there are slopes. When it rains, these are remarkably effective if saving all the little bits of water we might get, instead of decent rain. It will pay off, tighten your abs and help through droughts.

## Three Weeks to Chaos: Permaculture in the midst of energy abundance

by Richard Griffiths

I invited David Holmgren to speak in Katoomba about his new book, *Permaculture: Principles and Pathways Beyond Sustainability*, because it contained a paragraph that intrigued and challenged me. I wanted to find out more.

'Having pinned the relevance of permaculture to a future with less energy, what might be its relevance in some brave new world of abundant energy and resources (nuclear, genetic engineering, space colonies, or any of the other hoped-for or feared possibilities)? I suspect that the impact of permaculture would contract to influence the lives of relatively isolated individuals and groups who hold to minimal energy and resource use for ethical reasons.' (p. xvii).

This view annoyed me, because it suggested that permaculture might be irrelevant in the future, whereas I had found it hard up till then to conceive of a future where permaculture wasn't important. What was going on?

The talk itself, and other conversation with David and Su, helped to clarify matters for me. While there is abundant argument for an imminent doomsday scenario relating to the peak of world oil production and subsequent massive increases in energy costs, David's vision is wider than that. For him there may or may not be a major energy crisis within our lifetimes, but one does not need to be a prophet to recognise that the decline of non-renewable energy sources over the next few generations is inevitable. That being the case, we can sit around waiting for a magical technological solution that will get us out of trouble at the last minute, or we can seek to prepare ourselves, our families our communities and our culture for the changes ahead. Permaculture takes the latter course.

My grandfather grew tomatoes in a small green house on his allotment in North Wales. He didn't strictly need the tomatoes, but he loved the taste and smell of the homegrown varieties. Through tomato growing his summers were enriched beyond measure. Even today, when I smell a tomato I always think of him, of his hands teasing the vines into a semblance of riotous order and teaching me to do the same. On returning home from the Second World War he had read a bestselling back to the land book called *I Bought a Mountain*, and on the strength of it decamped a wife and four children to their own piece of a land fit for heroes on the slopes of Snowdonia above Caernarfon. There was no running water and not much else in the way of convenience. His wife, my Nana, hated it. Nevertheless it took her a couple of years to coax him back to the lowlands of the Welsh borders where he spent the rest of his working life as a painter and decorator.

In almost every way he lived in the wrong era for self-sufficiency. The 1950s consumer utopia was about to burst out all over and the mantra from the mainstream was 'You've never had it so good'. My grandfather wanted heaven; my grandmother settled for comfort. There was no material reason for him to choose a windswept smallholding and a handful of goats on the hill. He did it simply because he wanted to.

For most or all of us a measure of self-reliance is something we enjoy. It is not yet forced upon us by external circumstances. But let's imagine what our lives would be like if a serious energy crisis did strike in the not too distant future. Perhaps this is hard to do. For me it is not so hard. I was living in the UK in 2000 when the truck drivers organised an impromptu strike in protest at new taxes on their industry. Part of their strategy was to picket oil terminals and refineries. Within a matter of a couple of days there were big problems. It started with queues at petrol stations and fuel rationing, then schools were closing because teachers couldn't get themselves to work, next hospitals shut their doors because generators were running out of oil. Meanwhile supermarkets had run down their stocks due to a lack of deliveries compounded by panic buying.

In a short space of time, the whole of society was on the point of collapse. Not science fiction but reality. It was eerily mundane. The country was gripped with an uneasy lightheadedness. It couldn't possibly get worse because someone would surely do something about it. And sure enough just as soon as it had begun it stopped. The truck drivers lacked the ruthlessness as a group to push through their demands - after all they too had to live in a rapidly disintegrating nation! - and they called the whole thing off.

In a matter of hours the fuel tankers were on the roads again, and with petrol supplies back to normal, everyone else could get back to work once more. And the momentary crisis was almost entirely forgotten. Except that for some it left a kind of ghost at the party of energy-consumption-as-usual. It demonstrated fairly graphically how fragile is our hold on civilisation as we know it.

So today if you ask me how long I could live without oil I know for sure. The answer is worrying. It's about three weeks. After that no food, no heating, no medical support. And then there would be massive, widespread looting to contend with. Since it's Britain I'm thinking of, I imagine it as Mad Max with table manners.

Maybe it won't happen. Perhaps, somehow, energy will be abundant in the future. But every time I sow radishes I know it will be four weeks before I can eat them, or if I hold beans in my hand to plant, eight weeks. Every time I plant a tree I am conscious of what month it will be fruiting and how long the fruit will last. And so I try to plan accordingly. Every day the sun shines and every day it rains I am grateful that in spite of all that our dependency culture tries to make us forget, there is still the means available to support life in abundance, right on my doorstep. And every time I stand there and survey the paltry patch that is my attempt at backyard permaculture I am

acutely aware that for a long-term future to be possible for me and my family, individualistic self-sufficiency is neither possible nor enough.

We desperately need you, all of you - the small and inconspicuous community of people who are making steps small and sometimes large towards local self-reliance, not yet because you have to, but because there is still time, long may it last, to do it simply because you want to.

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Information about various scenarios of oil depletion can be found at:

[www.odac-info.com](http://www.odac-info.com)  
[www.wri.org](http://www.wri.org)  
[www.hubbertypeak.com](http://www.hubbertypeak.com)  
[www.oilcrisis.com](http://www.oilcrisis.com)

An article "Permaculture and the Third Wave of Environmental Solutions" by David Holmgren can be found on his website., [www.holmgren.com.au](http://www.holmgren.com.au) This article is based on a series of lectures around Australia following launches of his book *Permaculture: Principles and Pathways Beyond Sustainability* 2002 Holmgren Design Services. (Editor)

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## **BLUE MOUNTAINS ORGANIC COMMUNITY GARDEN**

### **Presents 'Bushcare without chemicals'**

Bush Care gathering on first Tuesday of the month from 10.00 - 12.00.

The idea is 'Bushcare without chemicals'. Exploring tools old and new to look after the bush without petrol or poisons.

Further details: Richard Griffiths, phone 4784 2046  
Email: [heymanandgriffiths@hotmail.com](mailto:heymanandgriffiths@hotmail.com)

## **BLACKHEATH COMMUNITY GARDEN**

by Suzanne Reaney

As I write we are gearing up for our 1st Spring Open Day on Saturday, September 20, 10am-2pm. The weather is traditionally fine and mild at this time of year and the forecast of sunny with a high of 17 shouldn't disappoint.

We'll have no-dig garden and also composting workshops, plantings, organic seedlings available for a small donation and some 20kg bags of sweet-smelling organic fertilizer

pellets and lots of info from Enviro-Tru, plus delicious home made food, local apple juice and BBQ available. Everyone welcome.

If you're interested in joining our group we have monthly planning/social meetings every 2nd Monday at 5.30pm at Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre or on-site at Whitley Park, cnr GWH & Prince George St, Blackheath, (depending on weather and light), and work days on-site every 2nd and 3rd Saturday of the month from 10am (maybe start earlier in high summer, have a break, then return early evening - we'll let you know).  
Contacts Suzanne 4787 5229, Matt 0425 253 396, Sue 4787 8887.

## **SUSTAINABLE WORK AND HOUSING**

**CHEC update by Chris Baulman**

Hi Everyone,

The Community Housing & Employment Co-op or CHEC is a group of people working together to achieve a simple yet high quality lifestyle - a sustainable lifestyle. We intend to show how anyone could achieve this through community housing and cooperative employment.

### **'NEW MEMBERS'**

A bunch of people are volunteering their time to the 'Groundwork' stage of CHEC. The CHEC waiting list welcomes new people.

To find out more, get involved  
or just say g'day give us a call.

20 Ridge St Woodford NSW 2778 Australia (02) 4758 8411  
Website - [www.caretakers.org.au/CHEC.htm](http://www.caretakers.org.au/CHEC.htm) email - [caretakers@earthling.net](mailto:caretakers@earthling.net)

## **MID MOUNTAINS SEED SAVERS - 2783**

**By Loret**

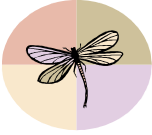
We are a small and enthusiastic group of organic gardeners from the mid Blue Mountains (Woodford - Bullaburra, however everyone is welcome from anywhere else!)

We have met twice now and our next meeting is planned for 16 November.

We met at members' houses and discuss seed preparation, as well as actually preparing whatever seed is in season. We also share secrets, successes (and failures) on gardening in general. We share lunch together afterwards.

All are welcome to come and share their enthusiasm and experiences.

Please contact Loret 4759 2118



## PEST REPORT

by Sue Girard

From a pest point of view Spring is often a time of trepidation for a Permaculturist- with great anticipation we plant our new seedlings only to discover that the pest insect species are breeding up fast & hungrily attacking all our hard work. Mean while there is no sign of any of the predatory & parasitic insects that we would hope to see emerging.

The reason for this is that nature is wise & has controlled insect development in such a way that the good guys don't come out in full force until there is enough food (the bad guys) for them to survive & multiply. Plus very often we don't recognize the juvenile stage of insects such as ladybeetle or dragonflies for what they really are, & treat them as a pest instead..

There are 3 types of insect life cycle development or metamorphosis. Firstly- the Primitive life cycle is where the juvenile stage is exactly the same as the larger adults for examples Silverfish. You may be surprised to know that there are 28 different types of silverfish in Australia alone.

Secondly, there are those insects with Gradual changes in development. These insects in fact don't change much as they grew older, but they do eventually develop wings of some shape or form. These are insects like Cockroaches, Grasshoppers & Termites... Dragonflies & the smaller Damselflies are important members of this type of metamorphosis & there are around 300 different types in Australia. Both adults & juveniles are beneficial predators, adults eat mosquitoes, beetles & flies. The immature forms are however less obvious than the swift day flying adults because they live in water, they are also much short & stouter than the adults & of course don't have any wing formation, at this stage they eat mosquito larvae, tadpoles & fish fry. Be on the lookout for Streamwatch stalls at the various Town Markets because they often have live Dragonfly nymphs on display.

Another predacious species from this Gradual Metamorphosis is the Praying Mantis & there are 162 different species in Australia. The juvenile insects look just like smaller versions of their parents, without the wings, they eat every thing even each other. It is the egg case that is the interesting feature of these insects. The female lays up to several 100 eggs in a frothy material that hardens into a foam capsule often found on the ends of twigs & branches.

The third type of insect development is known as Complete Metamorphosis because there is a complete change from the juvenile stage to the adult stage the most common example of course is a Butterfly.

Best known from a predatory point of view is the ladybeetle. But be aware that whilst most ladybeetles are good guys, around 300 in Australia in fact- there is one identified by it's 26 spots that eat plants not pests. Still a single red or yellow, adult 18 spot ladybeetle can eat well over 100 aphids in a day as well as mites, thrips, white fly & mealybugs; even juvenile ladybeetles will eat their weight in these pests many times over. But few people guess that the small fluffy "slaterish" like creatures clustered on the underside of leaves are in fact the babies of these my favourite beetles. And did you know that ladybeetles are in fact poisonous to hungry birds or that some more unusual ladybeetles that have stripes not spots.

That old phrase "observation makes the Permaculturist" is certainly true in the area of Intergrated Pest Management, (IPM) when you need to get the balance just right.

If anyone would like me to write about a specific area in IPM for the next newsletter please let me know on [pest.asides@bigpond.com.au](mailto:pest.asides@bigpond.com.au) & I'll see what I can do!

## **Sustainable Living Competition** forwarded by Paul Payten

The Sustainable Living Project's Sustainable Living Competition, is coming to a close for 2003. Entries for the competition close on 31st October 2003.

If you are involved with any schools or young people we would encourage you to enter their project for the competition .

This year has successfully engaged hundreds of high schools nationally in our competition, but were always looking to reward projects undertaken by innovative and creative young people around Australia.

Over \$30, 000 worth of prizes are available for winners and their schools in years 7 to 12. The 2003 prize pool includes DVD players for winning schools, Palm pilots for students, \$2K worth of library books for school, a data projector and heaps more.

There are a multitude of award categories designed to cater for any enviro/sustainability project from individual, class to whole school level. There are also specific categories designed to reward schools working towards becoming a

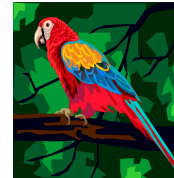
"sustainable school". (sustainable schools awards are open to any school primary or secondary).

We are also looking for interested parties for stalls at our awards ceremony on December the 5th. If you are an educational initiative with an environmental or sustainability theme and message, then you are welcome to attend the ceremony and promote your program.

For more details on the competition or awards day please refer to our website: [www.sustainableliving.com.au](http://www.sustainableliving.com.au) or drop me an email at: [andreg@fbe.unsw.edu.au](mailto:andreg@fbe.unsw.edu.au) or call (02) 9385 4979

Regards,

André Grant  
Education Co-ordinator  
The Sustainable Living Competition  
PH: 02 9385 4834  
c/o  
The Sustainable Living Project  
The Faculty of the Built Environment  
The University of New South Wales  
Sydney 2052 NSW Australia <<http://www.sustainableliving.com.au/>>



## MAGPIE CHATTER

by Rosemary Morrow [sorry Rowe I couldn't find a magpie]

Thank you Pat for taking over this newsletter.

Sue Girard has had part of her knee taken out and a new bit put in. she's already walking with much less of a limp. Her observation has improved as a result of her immobility. Do phone if you need to chat.

Sandra and children have become nomads.

Short term nomads are Craig MacDonald who wandered off the Alice Springs and visited the Centre for Appropriate Technology which is most impressive with its low

fuel stoves, open air ovens, hot water systems and washing machines. All simply effective, human energy systems and very exciting.

Wayne and Brian wandered off to Darwin and observed lots of waterholes and came back refreshed. Brian reports that sitting down by billabongs is very relaxing and the true way to live.

Belinda Bennett organised a successful day in Katoomba on Ecovillages - run by Sarah West who studied these for nearly one year and showed lots of slide.

Liz Connor has prepared her manuscript for *Cosmology Story* - so it can be prepared for public showing and acting by schools or others. Congratulations Liz. Contact Liz if you want to know more.

Blackheath Community Gardens held their Open Day on September 20. Congratulations on walking a long hard road with bureaucracy. Again congratulations.

There have been two good events at Katoomba Community Garden with a Peace activity on September 11 - with Seedsaving as the main topic. And then a Spring day on 20 September. Great to see the activity there.

Well, it's a little because your Magpie has been in Kabul for two months and missed some important news. Send your permaculture chatter to Rowe. The babbler.

END

## **Hawkesbury Earthcare Centre** forwarded by Paul Payten

The Hawkesbury Earthcare Centre is a wholeistic site for environmental management and education, situated in the grounds of The University of Western Sydney Hawkesbury campus, Corner of Science Rd & Campus Dr, Richmond

Our aim is to increase awareness of the urgent need for people everywhere on the planet to begin living sustainably NOW. We are developing the Centre as a place where information about sustainable living practices and the opportunity to gain skills are available to all.

Our web site is [www.earthcare.org.au](http://www.earthcare.org.au) The Centre's open day is on the first Saturday on each month with a talk or demonstration around midday.

There are three groups at the centre each with a different focus on environmental issues. As well as a great Food Coop!

### **Henry Doubleday Research Association**

Pure Food the Goal

Henry Doubleday Research Association (H.D.R.A.) was started in 1970 with a membership of gardeners, smallholders and farmers committed to going organic. The organisation has played an important contributing role in the growth of sustainable agriculture in Australia. The Association aims to serve the needs of people concerned about contamination of food and degradation of the environment by chemical- based agriculture. H.D.R.A. works to support progress towards:

Henry's web site is: [www.hdra.asn.au](http://www.hdra.asn.au)

### **Dwelling Place**

The Friendly House

Dwelling Place is founded on the principle that every person is entitled to secure housing. Its vision is the creation of appropriate dwellings for those in housing need. Dwelling Place is committed to housing design, which minimises environmental impacts, provides low- cost housing and encourages community building.

Dwelling Place's web site is: [www.earthcare.org.au](http://www.earthcare.org.au)

### **ATA - Alternative Technology Association**

Alternatives in Action

The Sydney branch of the Association is based at Hawkesbury EarthCare Centre where it runs educational seminars and offers practical demonstrations. A.T.A. is a national organisation with members' groups meeting regularly in many cities and towns of Australia, and also in New Zealand.

The ATA's web site is [www.ata.org.au](http://www.ata.org.au) There is a list of more events below.

4 October OPEN DAY - 12 noon - Building your own mudbrick house  
(talk)

1 November OPEN DAY - 12 noon - Waterwise gardening for summer  
(talk)

6 December OPEN DAY - End of year celebration

Tom Mellor

Sydney ATA Branch Convenor

Phone (02) 9332 4215

## WANTED FOR AUDITION

Do you live in the Upper Blue Mountains?

Do you like acting, miming, reading and telling stories, and/or making music?

Do you also think that new scientific and spiritual ideas about the story of our planet and the rest of the Universe may help us understand our place on Earth as ecological human beings?

Have you got time to help develop, rehearse and take part in a dramatic presentation of this Story this Spring/Summer?

Or do you know anyone who answers YES to all these questions?

People of all ages and ethnic backgrounds welcome, and we will need at least one person of Darug or Gundungurra descent.

Please ring Liz Connor to find out more, 4782 9380.

## MY TREES

My 100 year trees have suddenly burst into life  
I sit in my room that faces the morning sun  
And the windows are crowded with glowing, dancing leaves  
For the winds are blowing.

All winter the dark bare branches impose on the scene  
Challenging me to remember that they're still alive  
But also pricking my conscience they<sup>1</sup>re not of this place.

The first trees to put on a show were the apples and plums  
But they are still small so no real fanfare there.  
Then the high branches pushed out their own little knobs  
A subtle mutation you had to be eager to see.  
But now I am really aware that spring has sprung  
For the oaks are awake.

Is it my European blood that springs in response  
Reliving my ancestors<sup>1</sup> exile and longing for home?  
Do I remember an ice-age when many long years  
Merged into one dragging winter and spring was a tale  
That grandmothers told to the children around the warm fire?  
(They had heard it themselves in just the same wondering way.)  
Is my brain somehow attached to deciduous trees  
That grew tall when the huge hungry dinosaurs all left the stage?

But there's also (a much older bond)  
A bond between all plants and animals, microbes and Earth  
Somehow a knowing that each one sustains all the rest?  
For all beings are one.

Liz Connor, Katoomba, 2003

## ODDS & SODS

### Do you know:

- Rosemary Morrow had a starring role in the ABC's Compass program on Quakers last Sunday night.
- There is an annotated list of websites to do with saving water in Sydney Morning Herald's ECO Water Special September 30.
- The ABC's Bush Telegraph radio program is conducting a Water Challenge. "They key to the Challenge is to monitor personal water use because **if you can't measure it, you can't manage it.**" Information available on ABC website.
- And you now probably know your editor is a bit of a media junkie.

## SUMMER NEWSLETTER

Contributions for the Summer Newsletter by Friday 5 December PLEASE.