

The Land

Occidental Arts and Ecology Center's (OAEC) bioregional address reads something like this: Planer Gaia, Turtle Island, Shasta Bioregion, North Coast Range, Lower Russian River Watershed, Headwaters of Dutch Bill Creek, east-sloping drainages. The Sowing Circle intentional community and OAEC make their home on this east-facing 80-acre rectangular parcel (1/2 mile x 1/4 mile) with the long sides running North to South. The elevation of the land varies from 800 to 600 feet above sea level. While walking on the land one encounters numerous west- to east-flowing seasonal drainages that cut through the land. The drainages have carved out a sequential pattern of north- and south-facing slopes adding intrigue to a walk as you undulate across the landscape. This topographical

diversity creates many microclimates as one passes through the numerous vegetation communities along the trail network.

The sinuous ecotones of the landscape outline a fascinating mosaic of native plant communities. Fifty percent of the land is forested and forty percent is grassland or soft chaparral. Stands of Douglas Fir on the ridges are interdigitated by annual grasslands, Poison Oak/Coyote Brush, chaparral, and Coast Live Oak woodlands on the upper SE slopes. The land further descends through thick Bay Laurel stands into montane hardwood coniferous forests of Madrone and Interior Live Oak mixed with Douglas Fir continuing down to Redwood and Tan Oak forests on the lowest and wettest drainage bottoms. This array of bountiful vegetation supports up to 18 amphibian & reptile species, at least 20 mammal species and over 90 bird species. The natural diversity of the landscape is a result of our mediterranean climate and location in the North Coast Ranges between the Pacific Ocean and inland valleys to the east. People living in communities on the land have also conspired to enrich the diversity of this place. Summers are moderately hot (occasional periods in the 100's) tempered by a coastal fog cycle. Winters are wet and mildly cold.

The Human History

These high forested ridges were the gathering and hunting grounds for the Bodega Miwok and the Southern Pomo people. The land was homesteaded by Europeans in the 1850s. A series of early owners left their indelible marks with logging roads, cleared pastures, vineyards, orchards and trash dumps. Several of the tastier reminders are two 100+ year old Portuguese Amire Joanett pear trees that still produce 300 to 500 pounds each of premium dessert quality pears in late June.

The Farallones Institute came to the land in 1974 and until 1990 educated thousands of people on such topics as community development, appropriate technology, passive solar architecture & design, rammed earth, composting toilets, organic gardening, edible landscaping, and "whole life systems". The systems approach to site designing and development brought one of the

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founders of Permaculture, Bill Mollison, to the land to consult and teach on several occasions between 1974 and 1978. All of the existing residences, community structures, gardens, orchards and ponds were developed by the Farallones Institute.

In 1990 the land was sold to a foundation and renamed The Center for Seven Generations (CSG). CSG staff concentrated on infrastructural improvements and the CSG gardeners worked with the Seed Savers Exchange in Decorah, Iowa, to expand the already significant seed bank.

In July 1994 a group of biologists, activists, artists, and educators purchased the land and formed the intentional community Sowing Circle. The eight members of the Sowing Circle community founded OAEC to help fulfill our mission of creating and sustaining a social change. OAEC is a non-profit educational institute and retreat center that teaches and facilitates courses in ecological living skills, social justice fine arts and environmental education.

The core village area has a deer fence that encircles fifteen acres for intensive cultivation. OAEC has two acres of 23 year-old organic bio-intensive gardens, two acres of orchards and one acre of edible landscape. All of

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PermaList

Permaculture Books

1. Permaculture: A Designer's Manual by Bill Mollison, Island Press, 1990
2. Earth User's Guide to Permaculture by Rosemary Morrow, Kangaroo Press, 1993
3. The Permaculture Garden by Graham Bell, Thorson (Harper Collins Publishers), 1992
4. The Permaculture Way by Graham Bell, Thorson (Harper Collins Publishers), 1992
5. Introduction to Permaculture by Bill Mollison and Mia Slay, Tagari Press, 1991
6. Permaculture in a Nutshell by Patrick Whitefield, Permanent Publications, 1993
7. Urban Permaculture by David Watkins, Permanent Publications, 1993
8. Forest Gardening by Robert Hart, Green Books, 1993

and Magazines

1. Permaculture Activist
P.O. Box 1209, Black Mountain, NC 28711
2. PERMAculture International Journal
P.O. Box 1209, Black Mountain, NC 28711



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the agricultural water used on the land comes from a six-acre-foot catchment pond. Two small springs augment an ephemeral wildlife habitat/biological control pond in our North and South gardens.

Permaculture and Occidental Arts and Ecology Center

The implementation of permacultural principles at OAEC is a primary means of continuing the diversified evolution of this land. Perennial and annual polycultures, erosion control, water catchment, soil building, aquifer re-hydration, wild lands restoration, domestic animal systems, sustainable village economics, appropriate technology, natural building materials, and intentional consensus based community are fundamental permaculture ideas being actualized by the Sowing Circle and the Occidental Arts and Ecology community. Of specific interest at OAEC is the creation of temperate food forest systems that are not just biologically diverse in number of species, but more important are ecologically stable through a diversity of interactive relationships. The Pomo and Miwok managed and harvested an incredible abundance from their natural landscape. What productive systems can be created within our existing landscapes using all the edible native and exotic plants currently available? Collectively, we are at a unique juncture in time where the increasing diversity of food on our dinner tables contrasts starkly with the overwhelming global loss of biodiversity.

Preserving Diversity with Permaculture

OAEC is actively involved with a global movement to preserve the diversity of the world's crops. Our process of creating a productive permaculture village design includes creating a collection of plants to serve as a germplasm repository for biodiversity preservation. We are currently focusing on growing, preserving, testing, tasting and dispersing a wide diversity of useful plants, especially crops from the Americas. Planted and catalogued on site are over 175 species

and 400 varieties of edible perennial trees, and vines. There is an annual seed collection which contains at least 2000 vegetable, herb and flower varieties. Many of these species are available at the OAEC nursery.

We have begun in earnest to respond to the oft-asked question, (said with a nasal twang), "When ya gonna put in a permaculture garden?", by designing and selecting two new sites for diversified polyculture food forests. Our two acre 'barn slope' and one acre 'banana belt' slope are in the beginning stages of transitioning from cleared forests and steep pastures into diverse polycultural food/useful materials forests. The 'barn slope' is home to our nineteen laying hens, affectionately known as the 'Girlfriends' and three hives of honey bees. Other design elements are barn roof catchment, spring development, cistern water storage, bamboo, swales, wildlife enhancement and sheet mulching with an on-site annual resource of scotch broom coppice. This winter and spring we will be planting and grafting many new and different utilitarian plants to add to the existing black walnuts, chestnuts, hazelnuts, apples, plums, peaches, cherries, grapes, pineapple guavas, figs, and loquats.

A number of swales have been installed on the 'banana belt' slope by permaculture design course students, and after watching them in every storm, they are all performing spectacularly: catching, holding, and infiltrating lots of water. The plantings of chestnuts, heartnuts, trazels, hazelnuts, peaches and white sapotes are settling into the 'banana belt' slope nicely with swale irrigation. Many new plants are waiting to be planted this winter/spring as well. All of the swales and gabions on the land have been especially critical in keeping the soil on the land and out of Dutch Bill Creek and the Russian River.

A basic tenet of permaculture education at OAEC is not to teach dogmatically about how to create a system but more how to THINK about creating systems. The empowerment of people with a new conceptual framework and hands-on tools adapted for change is a fundamental goal of

OAEC. OAEC has been teaching Permaculture for one and a half years and has already unleashed on the world fifty graduates with certificates in permaculture design. The continued support of educational programs at OAEC is one of the primary economical means of allowing our community model to continue the ecological stewardship of the land.

At OAEC, village scale economics and regenerative land management practices are working in concert towards the goal of designing and implementing a just living from sustainable systems on the land. All of us at the Sowing Circle and OAEC community are proud to be a part of the global permaculture community dedicated to healing ourselves through healing the land. We all live in a watershed that, in the words of permaculture, needs our 'protracted and thoughtful' energy.



-Brock Dolman
Co-founder of
Occidental Arts
and Ecology
Center

General Permaculture Resources

- 1. Networks Productions**
918 Broderick St. San Francisco, CA
94115 (415) 346-1846
Videos on Permaculture
- 2. Permaculture Resources**
56 Farmersville Road, Califom, NJ 07830
(800) 832-6285
Books, Videos
- 3. Traveler's Earth Repair Network**
Box 4469, Bellingham, WA 98227
(360) 738-4972
- 4. Real Goods**
966 Mazzoni Street, Ukiah, CA
95482-3471 (800) 762-7235
Leading supplier in alternative energy products and sustainable living.
- 5. Permanent Publications**
Hyden House Limited, Little Hyden Lane, Clanfield, Hampshire, PO8 ORU 596500 United Kingdom
Books, magazines.
- 6. The Permaculture Plot Permanent Publications** (see address above-#5)
A list of over 50 permaculture operations.
- 7. Ag Access**
603 4th Street, Davis, CA 95616
A complete resources for publications on permaculture and agriculture.

Occidental Arts and Ecology Center, 15290 Coleman Valley Road, Occidental, CA 95465
(707) 874-1557 -- Call for info. about upcoming Permaculture courses at OAEC