

Ally Hurcikova, Professional Gardener's Trust Report Award of £510 for Permaculture Design Course (PDC)

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at Landmatters Permaculture Co-operative
August 2015



I work as a Freelance Community Gardener in Edinburgh with various organisations including the Federation of City Farms & Community Gardens, Trellis Scotland and the Lochend Community Growing Project. The job involves elements of horticultural skills and hands on training, community support and group development and networking different projects across Scotland.

I received £510 award from the Worshipful Company of Gardeners towards a £690

Permaculture Design Course held at Landmatters Permaculture Cooperative in Devon in August 2015.

Permaculture is a design system based on observations of patterns in nature, which can then be applied to agricultural and other systems to create low impact, sustainable practices. It originated in Australia in the 1970s and has since spread around the globe and had a great impact in both temperate and tropical regions. Permaculture is an ethics based practice, built on three values of Earth Care, People Care & Fair Share and also wider principles of using the lowest possible input to achieve greatest output, while wasting nothing. There are few community gardens in Scotland built using permacultural practices and so I felt it was a valuable skillbase to be able to share with projects I work with.

The course lasted for 2 weeks, and covered a huge variety of topics. The first week explored various principles including: the ethics and history of permaculture, ecology & biological systems, observation of patterns in nature, flows of water systems, soil chemistry and biology, slope & elevation, microclimates & soil indicator species. We also were given tours of Landmatters Permaculture Co-operative and the chance to learn about its fascinating history. Landmatters is fully off grid with 10 adults and 7 children living in self built benders and yurts. They run their whole site co-operatively using permaculture principles and have limits on the number of days members can work off site so that enough energy is put into managing their 42 acres.



The course involved three other site visits: to the Agroecology Research Trust – Martin Crawford's world famous 'Forest Garden' on 2 acres outside of Totnes, Devon; a visit to School Farm CSA (community supported agriculture) on the Dartington Estate, and a tour of the Transition Town Totnes.

The second week focused mainly on design principles including mapping and creating overlays, measuring contours, how to carry out a client interview, taking detailed observations of a site relying on your sensory experience & calculated detail i.e. how to read a landscape, how to move from observation to analysis and placing design features and elements. All the course participants then had to work on their own design in groups. For me this was the most challenging and exciting part of the course, as I am already quite familiar in foundation ecology & soil science, but previously had little confidence in my designing skills. I was impressed by how simple the Permaculture Design Process made designing a complex site with many users. We followed steps given to us by the course leader and were able to narrow down our choices of what features and elements to include quite easily by paying close attention to essential factors like the wishes of the client, the direction of the prevailing wind, the movements of the sun, and the soil type underfoot. Having had an opportunity to explore the whole design process it felt very possible to repeat at a later stage.

The PDC course was extremely well put together and excellent value for money. It was very full of content (it ran from 9am to 9pm for two weeks), and great care and attention was put into making sure our needs were met. A kitchen team provided us with close to 5 organic meals a day all cooked offgrid in an outdoor field kitchen on fires, gas burners, rocket stoves and an earth oven.

Since completing the PDC I have started a new job as the Scotland Development Worker for the Federation of City Farms & Community Gardens. This involves supporting our member projects all over the country including delivering training where necessary. In February 2016 I will be delivering a Site Design for community gardens Training Day in Aberdeenshire.



Top Right: Our base map with overlays such as frost pockets & prevailing winds at different times of the year.
 Middle Right: the 'desire lines' overlay
 Bottom Left; My Design Team presenting our final design for the area outside the communal kitchen at Landmatters Permaculture Co-operative.
 I am standing to the right of the whiteboard.