# Carescapes: permaculture design for every Body



Thoughts on designing daily life with the spoons, time, and energy you actually have...

Notes from a Free Online Conversation & Workshop,
with Kirsten Bradley (Milkwood) & Anna Matilda (Everyday Permaculture)

# Carescapes - Workshop Notes

We acknowledge that permaculture owes the roots of its theory and practice to traditional and Indigenous knowledges, from all over the world.

We all stand on the shoulders of many ancestors - as we learn, and re-learn, these skills and concepts.

We pay our deepest respects and give our heartfelt thanks to these knowledge-keepers, both past and present.

## Designing with the Energy We Have

Permaculture is a design system for living in relationship - with ecosystems, households, and our own bodies. It helps us work with limits and build resilience.

- Shortcuts are tools, not failures.
- Small & slow steps are valid and often most resilient.
- Design = reframing guilt into gentle action and collective agency.

## What We Mean by "Permaculture"

- Reciprocity, responsibility, and belonging…  not just for designing gardens; also kitchens, households, bodies, and communities.

- Roots in lutruwita/Tasmania (1970s): Mollison & Holmgren drawing on biomimicry, ecological science, Indigenous knowledge, traditional knowledge.

- Context: your front step, bed and body are part of the ecosystem; small connected acts shift systems.

## Who Gets to Live Sustainably?

Capacity is shaped by privilege and barriers; curiosity and tolerance matter.

- Health & chronic illness, disability & neurodivergence, money & time, age, race/gender/marginalisation - all affect our ability to 'do all the things'.

- Many of us rent or care for others; we can design beautiful systems in flats, sharehouses, backpacks, or beds.

## Respect to the Knowledge Keepers

- Mia Mingus (Pod mapping)
- Looby Macnamara (People & Permaculture)
- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (crip culture)
- KT Shepherd (Zoning for chronic illness)
- Dean Spade (Mutual aid)
- Rowe Morrow (Permaculture Design)
- Dave Holmgren + Bill Mollison

…and many others extending people-focused, justice-oriented design.

## The Daunting Bit & Why Design Helps

- We're in ecological overshoot; climate disruption and biodiversity loss are real.
- Eco-guilt is a nudge to care; blame is systemic - design helps us act without burning out.
- Grace clause: sometimes takeaway, a hot shower, or a nap is the most sustainable act for today.

→ Try: Write down one "grace clause" you want to allow yourself this week.

## Energy as Design Material

Treat energy like water/soil: observe, conserve, regenerate.

Christine Miserandino's **Spoon Theory** describes daily energy as a finite budget of spoons. Folks with chronic illness or disability will start each day with fewer spoons, so every action must be budgeted.

- Budget wisely: spend intentionally on what matters most today.
- Renew spoons: naps, beauty, music, companionship.
- Design for depletion: fallback systems for low-energy days (meals in freezer, commode near bed, auto-replies).
- Respect fluctuation: like ecosystems, some days are abundant, others scarce.

Permaculture aligns: observe, conserve, and regenerate energy at scales of self, household, and community.

→ Try: Sketch your daily "spoon budget" - where do your spoons go, and what renews them?

## Zones for Daily Life

Zones organise tasks by frequency and energy, not distance.

- Classic 0–5 (+6 social) zones: from self/home to wild/community.

- People-focused zoning (props to KT Shepherd): optimise capacity:

  - Zone 0: meds, charger, snacks, notebook within reach.
  - Zone 1: kettle cluster, meds cluster, go-bag, wild shelf.
  - Zone 2–3: pantry, laundry, admin nook, weekly tasks.
  - Zone 4–5: occasional or community projects.

- Digital zones: calendar & notes (Z0), daily messages (Z1), weekly review (Z2).

**Design moves:**

- Access defines zone.
- Zones can repeat (snack kits in different rooms).
- Distance = stairs/decisions/noise too.
- Secure Zone 0/1 first before expanding.

→ Try: Move one daily task closer to Zone 0 or 1 so it costs less energy.

# Permaculture Principles → Daily Practice

## 1. Observe & Interact: notice rhythms, pain, joy

Observation is the beginning of care. Keep energy logs, mood notes, and awareness of body rhythms. Notice not just fatigue but also what replenishes you - daydreams, walks, or a warm drink.

→ Try: Track your energy for three days - when does it peak, and when does it dip?

## 2. Catch & Store Energy: batch cooking, naps, done lists

Energy comes in pulses. Capture good days by batch-cooking, freezing meals, writing "done lists," or banking goodwill in community networks.

→ Try: Next time you have extra energy, do one thing to support your future self.

## 3. Obtain a Yield: rest, laughter, repaired things

Redefine yield to include naps, laughter, comfort foods, repaired objects, and quiet evenings. Yields are survival, comfort, and dignity.

→ Try: At day's end, name one yield you received, however small.

## 4. Apply Self-Regulation & Feedback: logs, buffer time

Signals like pain or overwhelm are feedback, not failure. Build systems that respect them. Create "future-you notes" and add buffer space around commitments.

→ Try: Add a buffer before and after your next appointment.

## 5. Use Small & Slow Solutions: tiny shifts compound

Break tasks into tiny steps. Like soil built spoonful by spoonful, slow systems deepen resilience. Scaling down or slowing down is resilience, not failure.

→ Try: Choose one task you can break into smaller steps and spread out.

## 6. Produce No Waste: rest is compost, not waste

Reframe waste. Rest is composting time - energy regenerating quietly. Disposables, too, can be survival design when they conserve your capacity.

→ Try: Reframe one "wasteful" thing in your week as compost — energy transforming.

## 7. Design from Patterns to Details: map cycles first

Map rhythms before diving into details: weekly dips, seasonal moods, or household cycles. Anchor broad strokes and let details remain flexible.

→ Try: Identify one weekly or seasonal pattern and design around it.

## 8. Integrate Rather than Segregate: overlap tasks

Overlap tasks to multiply resilience: laundry + audiobook, craft + social. True integration means designing for many bodies and needs, enriching everyone.

→ Try: Pair one necessary task with something you enjoy.

# Permaculture Principles → Daily Practice

### 9. Use & Value Diversity: many supports build resilience

Resilience comes from multiple supports: herbs and meds, shop-bought beans and home sprouts, family members sharing the load. Diversity spreads responsibility and builds strength.

→ Try: Add one new support into your system this week.

### 10. Use Edges & Value the Marginal: innovation emerges here

Edges are fertile, messy places. They can be draining or inspiring, risky or fertile. They're where innovation happens and where more inclusive ways of living often begin.

→ Try: Notice one "edge space" in your life - is it draining, inspiring, or both?

### 11. Use & Value Renewable Resources: naps, aids, community fridges

Renewables are personal (naps, mobility aids), community (meal trains, car-pools), and natural (herbs, sunshine). Design care and work so they renew, not deplete.

→ Try: Identify one renewable resource you can value more - personal, natural, or community.

### 12. Creatively Use & Respond to Change: design flexibly

Change is constant. Better to design for the world as it is than cling to a version that won't return. Build rest and renewal into daily systems so change is survivable.

→ Try: Name one change you're facing, and one gentle adjustment that could help.

Permaculture design can be used to offer a realistic map for care and resilience: observe → store → zone → yield → integrate → adapt.

Above all: **Rest is a strategy. Shortcuts can be tools. Small steps, linked with others, change systems.**

# Resources and things to explore:

## From Kirsten:

- What is permaculture? - book extract, plus Holmgren's principles

- Permaculture Living - our online course

- Milkwood.net - our library of useful things

## From Anna:

- Everyday Permaculture - By Anna Matilda

- The Urban Nanna - Anna's Website

- Energy Charting tools:
  - Track your spoons
  - Mental health trackers

### Spoons theory

The Spoon Theory (OG essay - pdf) - Christine Miserandino

Usable Hours & the Diversity of Humans - adjacent to above

### Permaculture design for zone 00 + 0

- The Permaculture Living Handbook - Kirsten Bradley

- KT Shepherd - Zoning and designing for chronic illness
  - her current website is here
  - her previous blog (with lots of goodness) is here

- People & Permaculture - Looby Macnamara

- Earth Restorer's Guide to Permaculture - Rowe Morrow

- Permaculture Design - a step-by-step guide - Aranya - such a great lil book (for beyond Zone 1, just fyi)

### Mutual Aid

- Pod Mapping - Mia Mingus

- Mutual Aid: building solidarity during this crisis (and the next) - Dean Spade - also check out his new podcast, it's ace.

### Disability Justice

- The Future is Disabled - Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (and everything else by them)

- Cripping the Anthropocene - season one, episode 1 - wormhole alert!

**You can watch the replay of the workshop at the link below - password is CARESCAPES.**

### CLICK HERE

*...and below, we've added all the awesome ideas and links that folks contributed in the live workshop chat... thanks to everyone who could come along!*

# Resources from the Live chat:

These resources, tools, and reflections were generously shared in the chat during our Carescapes workshop...

## Permaculture Principles & Tools

- Louise: Ballarat Permaculture Guild - David Holmgren's Principles - a clear, accessible summary of the 12 principles.

- Emily: Permaculture Principles - permacultureprinciples.com - central hub with explanations, posters, and resources.

## Pippa: Mnemonics for remembering principles

- Principle 7 (Patterns to Details): Big at the top, details at the bottom.
- Principle 9 (Small & Slow): The snail looks like a 9.
- Principle 10 (Diversity): Slender 1 + round 0 - different, but work together.
- Principle 11 (Edges): Parallel lines = edges galore.
- Principle 12 (Change): The end and the beginning - time to change.

## Energy, Spoons & Capacity

- Talara: Usable Hours & Chronic Illness - Article on usable hours - a planning tool for people with limited daily capacity.

- Fee: Colour-coded calendar system - uses colours to balance energy across the week (purple = work, red = urgent, yellow = home, orange = fun, green = nature).

- Phoebe: Care Cart - a bedside cart stocked with snacks, meds, and personal-care supplies for low-energy days.

- Talara: Designing around 4 usable hours - plans life around an average of 4 usable hours/day, combining Spoon Theory with energy budgeting.

# Resources from the Live chat:

## Language, Neurodiversity & Self-Compassion

- Fee: Upwording (Language Practice Group) - upwording.com - community project for noticing and adapting the language we use.

- Fee: Neuroqueer Glossary - neuroqueer.com - glossary of neurodiversity terms created by the community.

- Pippa: Soil metaphor for neurodiversity - escribed ADHD/project management using a soil/blueberry analogy - framing compatibility, not deficiency.

## Self-Reflection & Values

- Rae: VIA Character Strengths - viacharacter.org - an assessment tool for identifying personal values and strengths.

- Connie: Personal energy audit - suggestion: observe your actual daily capacity and design realistically from there.

- Hilary: Grief tending & community rhythm - dea: regular rhythms like firepits or potlucks as spaces for grief and connection.

## Community & Creative Projects

- Fee: Urban Bodgers - Neuroqueer Green Woodworking Project - workshops with neuro/gender-affirming and trauma-informed practices.

- Fee: Urban greenspace co-founding - shared learnings from starting a community greenspace during lockdowns.

## Pippa: Zoned input requests

- Helped a chronically ill friend create lists of what kind of help to ask for at different energy levels.

Thanks for coming, everyone!