

Day 13: Develop a plan. Write it down. Stage it. Finance it. Implement it.

If you don't know where you are going, how will you know if/when you arrive?

On [Day 4](#), the advice was "Know Yourself." And this should not be a casual acquaintance, it needs to be an in depth knowledge of how and where you live, and what and how much resources you use. Without that information, you don't know your starting point. Sitting around in the parking lots of Grateful Dead concerts in the 1980s, we used to say, "Wherever you go, there you are," but for this purpose you need a more precise and accurate definition of where and who you are if you are going to journey towards sustainability. Keep records of your spending, what foods you eat and in what quantity, and how much energy you use (gasoline, diesel, propane, natural gas, electricity, biodiesel, ethanol, whatever it is you use). The longer you keep those records, the more valuable they are for planning purposes.

Knowing includes observation. What do you see around you in your neighborhood? What is on your property? What plants are growing? Where does the water run when it rains? Where is the sunlight and the shade as the sun travels across the sky during the day? What animals, birds, insects inhabit your territory?

If you start with a written plan, you have a better understanding of the total scope of the project. This is more important than most people understand. A plan will give you confidence in your project. You will know what you need to do and about when it needs to be done and what will be required to implement your project. Confidence will enable you to actually get started.

A plan helps you be more efficient and frugal in your use of labor, resources, and money. You won't do something, and then un-do it, or have to re-do it, to accommodate some other important and interesting project.

Contents of such a plan include:

- + Your location, its eco-system, weather patterns (minimum and maximum temperatures), rainfall and snow, prevailing winds, everything there is to know about a place. You should review at least ten years climate data for your location, or as close to your location as is practical.

- + Your goals, needs, desires, and maybe even a few wants. When you are finished with this project, what does the result look like? What problems with the site must be addressed by this report?

- + Nutrient cycles - this includes soil and its management and fertility maintenance, food production, food processing and storage, food consumption, and human waste management.
- + Shelter - what kind of a dwelling do you live in, what changes does it need to be a more sustainable home?
- + Access - how do you get to where you need to go? Where are the bus routes? What about inter-city travel?
- + Energy - passive solar heating and cooling, recycling and waste management, "demand destruction"/energy conservation, electric and natural gas usage, transportation fuel, insulation, caulking/weatherizing, all issues relating to energy and your household are discussed here.
- + Water - ways to reduce water use, emergency water sources, rainwater harvesting and storage, grey water.
- + Community - what is your place in your community? How can you help your community become a more sustainable place? What structures are already in place? What needs to be done?
- + Economics - how much is this going to cost and where are the resources and the money coming from? What other resources can you beg, barter, borrow, or share to implement this project? What happens if you lose your job? Do you have economic contingency plans?
- + Hazards - what hazards are associated with your property and area? E.g. tornadoes, is the property located within the potential footprint of a dangerous chemical release, etc. How will you manage these hazards? What is your plan for catastrophes and recovery?
- + Staging - in what sequence will these projects be implemented? Generally, a five year staging sequence is a good idea.

You may be thinking - what is this, a plan for a self-sufficient homestead? Well, it could be, but this outline (which is the basic outline of a permaculture design report) is equally applicable to urban situations. The answers/designs/recommendations in the city may be different than those for a rural property, but the principles and categories are the same. For example, you don't have to grow all your own food in the city to be sustainable you do need a plan describing how you will get your food from sustainable sources.

The staging section is one of the most important parts of your own report. If your shelter section includes "painting the interior" to brighten the aesthetics, don't do that before you punch holes in the walls to blow in cellulose insulation. Do the painting after you have done the insulation and patched the holes. Write the staging section after you do all the rest of the planning. This will allow you to see the scope of the project. Generally, you

"pick the low hanging fruit first", doing the easy and cheap stuff first, before moving on to larger, more complex and expensive aspects of your plan.

When you develop the budget, always add at least 25% for cost-overruns and price increases. For the budgets of projects in future years, add inflation to the price (my suggestion is to double the officially reported CPI rate for your budgets that run into future years).

I suggest putting this written document into a three ring binder, so you can easily make changes by adding or removing pages. Keep important papers related to the project - maps, sketches, price lists, catalogs, receipts - in the binder.

The staging of this project is:

First, know yourself and where you want to go. Observe!

Second, develop a plan to get there and write the plan. Judge!

Third, finance the plan (that is, determine and acquire the resources needed).

Fourth, implement the plan. Act!

Note that "finance" does not necessarily mean money, although it is likely for most of us that some amount of money will be required. It can mean your own sweat equity and resources you have on hand or can find for free.

We didn't start with a written plan, and as a result we made mistakes and it cost us more money and (even worse!) more work. I am preparing a written plan now - a permaculture design report - as part of the distance-learning Permaculture Design Course I have been involved with for the last year. It starts where we are now, and carries our project five years into the future. For our household, this will end up being a ten year process and we are midway through that journey. You can cut five years off the process, however, by starting with a written plan. Even if it takes you a year to write your plan - and it may very well take you a year - you will end up being further ahead than if you just randomly do stuff. If you have just moved to a property, a year of observation will be helpful as you write your plan.

NB: "Writing a plan" is not an excuse for procrastination. Procrastination is the thief of time and the destroyer of future hopes. If you want to write a plan, you must begin to plan and write. Use the big categories above, and get busy! To help folks in central Oklahoma, I have ten years of climate data that I have put into spreadsheets. I will convert those to tables and post them at my energy conservation info website in the next couple of days so that people can access the information. Note that monthly averages are worthless for preparing a report like this. If someone shoots six bullets at you, and only one of them hits and kills you, are you on average 16% dead? The rule here is to design to

Make sure all stakeholders are involved - everyone who lives in the household should have something to say in this plan, including the kids old enough to understand what is going on.

For more information check out:

www.bettertimesinfo.org

www.energyconservationinfo.org