

When we moved into our property in 2013 the lawns were in pretty bad shape. Basically we got sick and tired of having to mow, water, fertilize, and weed the lawn. So we decided to sheet-mulch the lawn, both in the front and back yard. We aerated the lawn, put down a layer of compost, then a layer of newspapers (total about 3" thick), then a layer of cardboard, making sure everything overlapped to avoid any light coming through. Then a layer of leaves, and finally a layer of wood chips. It was important to water in between each layer to avoid runoff of rainwater.

It took about 6 months to naturally kill off the grass this way. We don't use chemicals or roundup in our garden because it kills all the good stuff. And the bad stuff just comes back with a vengeance. Now we have a maintenance free "forest floor". The worms happily ate through the cardboard and dropped their castings further fertilizing the soil organically. Just by adding more organic material you keep building and repairing the soil. "Green manure" (plants that die off and break down back into the soil) works great, adding more compost, leaves, straw, and wood chips. We love the chop and drop method where you chop the leaves of plants at the end of their growing cycle and dandelions (don't let them go to seed) and drop what you cut back into the soil. By doing this you activate the plant to release its nitrogen into the soil where it belongs and other trees and plants around it benefit from the nitrogen. We sometimes even throw organic kitchen scraps directly into the yard (something we learned from reading Ruth Stout's books). Just toss them in between the plants and don't even bother to "compost" them, because it will break down anyhow. We are amazed how flowers and veggies (re)appear in our yard without having planted them. We planted several fruit trees (Braeburn Apple, Improved Alberta Peach, Asian Pear, and Golden Delicious Apple), and have gradually started adding more plants around them (nitrogen fixers such as Lupine, etc.) creating what are called guilds. By adding more layers of plants of different heights, such as berry bushes, herbs, and nitrogen fixers, these guilds will produce more and more edibles over time. A good source to consult about permaculture in general and guilds in particular is Gaia's Garden by Toby Hemenway.

To be clear we are not doing "nothing". That would be considered abandonment. Instead we carefully observe what's happening in our yard, learn from it, and experiment and so far we have not been disappointed. Nor have the birds, the butterflies, and the bees!

We've learned a lot from the internet from people like Bill Mollison, Masanobu Fukuoka, Larry Korn, Matthew Stephens, Geoff Lawton, Toby Hemenway, and Teague Cullen (who runs the Winslow Food Forest in Portland, Oregon). Any of these earth loving heroes have so much experience with this thing called "Permaculture" that one cannot help but be moved by it. If you care about the earth, animals and people then permaculture is the way to go. We can only hope that whoever ends up purchasing our house will appreciate and enjoy the fruits of our labor. We will miss our yard, but it gives us joy to know that we can repeat the same process in our new yard!

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Visser