



The Paternilla Community of Living Beings mural brings together many different people, in a collaboration that slows us down and leaves room to focus and to chat



Bridging the Gap with the *Neighbours*

**Jorge Gallardo,
Joanna Crowson and
Andrew Zionts Abrams**
explore some useful ideas
and techniques to help
build bridges in the local
community

Permaculture tools offer so many answers to the current problems that we can all see in the natural world, and we need to find ways to spread this knowledge. But if we head out to meet our neighbours excited to tell them about the latest fantastic example of permaculture practice we're using, or to point out to them how they could stop the erosion on their land, we have fallen straight into the trap of permaculture evangelism. It's always better to start by listening and discovering what people already know. In the case of rural areas, what examples of local good practice do our neighbours use that we can adopt? What can we learn from them? By way of a simple example, plant and seed swapping sessions are great for hearing what varieties work in your area, and what heritage crops people are still growing, as well as sharing your own experiments with new varieties.

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Permablitz

Taking the opportunity to open your doors to visitors is a good way to meet interested people too. Hosting volunteering days or visits to your project is a great way to reach people, at the same time getting some work done. The permablitz format works well, since participants will leave with a better overview of the context and how permaculture design works.

It will really help to network with other permaculture and regenerative projects in your area, since there is power in numbers. Here Mollison's 'Cooperation principle' comes into play: work with neighbourhood associations, other local groups and activists, joining and supporting existing initiatives and, in turn, inviting and including them in yours. Think about what you can offer at least as much as you think about what you need – perhaps you could organise a quarterly rotating permablitz, working together to support each other and meeting new people as you go?



Sifting compost



An educational activity guerrilla gardening with students from our local high school

Seed swaps and WhatsApp

It's helpful to start by finding 'Small, slow solutions' – a modest, roadside seed swapping event may grow into something bigger. Our local permaculture WhatsApp group started with a handful of people and has grown steadily. A varying number of people come to the different events and meetups we organise, but our philosophy is that if something is worth doing, we do it and who comes, comes.

When thinking about reaching out to your local community, then it's important to 'Use and value diversity'. We work with local schools, scout groups, local neighbourhood associations, activist groups and so on. A quick look at the permaculture flower shows the multiple areas that permaculture can be applied to, so think wide and be inclusive of all interests. The person who comes to a workshop to learn about making soap or preserving fruit may appear at your next volunteer tree-planting day. And you can be strategic, too, arranging events focused on a certain topic to reach specific sectors or groups of people. It's helpful to explore the 'edge effect'. This will be very important because, in the end, if you really want to spread your regenerative practices, you're going to benefit from finding a variety of spokespeople. If you're seen as an outsider, finding local voices will be a great help. But whether or not you're a local yourself, you will benefit from including people from the ecotone – the areas that overlap with your work – to find messengers with different registers and access.



Preparing signage for our big event

Finca Catalina is a land-based permaculture sanctuary located on 13 hectares of land on a hillside in the region of La Janda in southern Spain. A number of groups, volunteers and specialists have been working on the project since 2014, led by Andrew Zions Abrams. The work has involved restoring the functionality of the ecosystem by creating a zero-runoff water retention landscape, reforesting and experimenting with regenerative agriculture and care for the soil, working with sociocracy to strengthen our human community, and connecting to the community of life using tools from deep ecology. Almenara is our outreach project focused on using permaculture's triple ethic to explore beyond the idea of sustainability as sustaining a given situation over time (including what may be an impoverished and degraded landscape and/or community), instead coming together to imagine a regenerative future for all life.

Organise an annual festival

Last but not least, it's hugely important to bring people together to celebrate, to share their joy and enthusiasm and to inspire others. Our annual festival is a great example of celebrating while 'stacking functions' – with the help of our network of local regenerative initiatives we put together a programme of talks, walks and simple workshops to share our ideas and regenerative practices. We run a simple 'human library' networking session, plus we eat together, hang out, listen to music and close the day dancing outdoors. With so many participants, the publicity for the event goes wider than usual and always brings in some new people as well as many familiar faces. As the sun goes down and we all gaze out over the valley to the sea, we feel our connection and the joy just bubbles up, renewing our commitment to the work we need to do to bring permaculture tools to the building of a regenerative future.

The work of building bridges is ongoing and these are just a few of the things we've tried. There's still a lot we need to do to build connections with our local community, and we'd love to hear from all you other permaculture practitioners out there... What do you do that works? Please post your ideas on *Permaculture* magazine's Facebook page.

More on community:

'Regenerating Urban Communities' PM93
'Permablitz' PM85



Jorge Gallardo, co-founder and coordinator of the cooperative Be.Time SCA, created in April 2017, works as a cultural mediator in a small town south of Cádiz, developing projects for the regeneration of species and landscapes and mobilising civil commitment in the protection of the commons.

Joanna Crowson discovered her passion for permaculture in 1993 when she and her family bought land and started creating Casa Gaia in Cádiz. She currently works as a translator, educator and writer, focusing on creating regenerative cultures through reconnecting to the earth.

Andrew Zions Abrams has a background in fine arts, industrial design, permaculture and yoga. He has been implementing a rainwater retention and reforestation design on his farm since 2014, sharing the work and his passion and knowledge with volunteers and friends.