

Principle 1: Observe and interact



“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder”

We keep our zone 5, wilderness, so that we can appreciate the natural woodland, with all its biodiversity. As well as being beautiful, it allows us to increase the range of habitats for vertebrates and invertebrates that are part of the food web for our garden – e.g. birds, newts, bees and fungi.

Principle 2: Catch and store energy



“Make hay while the sun shines”

The well-known nutrient accumulator, comfrey, grows pretty well on this site and we use its leaves to mulch soil next to fruiting bushes etc. However, alkanet, bindweed and bramble are also pretty enthusiastic. We use these as a source of compost by letting them rot aerobically in free-draining boxes resting on watertight boxes. Because they rot aerobically, the resulting liquid feed doesn't smell.

Principle 3: Obtain a yield



“You can't work on an empty stomach”

We have around 200 different species of plant here – most of which are edible. We usually pick a leafy/flowery salad to go with our lunch. And at lunch we get another excellent yield – each other's company. For some reason, everyone who comes to ELL is lovely!

Principle 4: Apply self-regulation & accept feedback



“The sins of the fathers are visited on the children unto the seventh generation”

This pond was originally meant to be a clay-lined. We used clay from this site but it kept on drying out and cracking. We tried covering it in between sessions, soaking it in huge boxes, removing any big stones by hand, laying it on very thick. We tried growing plants over the edge of it to stop it drying out. We tried and tried. In the end we had to accept that it just wasn't working and we made this end of the pond into a bog garden. Now galingale, mint and meadowsweet have the perfect home.

Principle 5: Use & value renewable resources & services



“Let nature take its course”

Our rainwater harvester (which is also a shelter for us) effortlessly collects water that we can use on our plants. This water is free from chemicals such as chlorine and is the best water for plants.

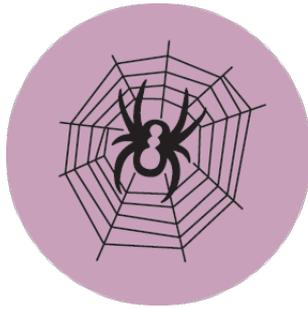
Principle 6: Produce no waste



“A stitch in time saves nine” Waste not, want not”

We use our urine to feed the soil next to these comfrey plants. Urine is a rich source of the macro-nutrients - Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Potassium as well as many micro-nutrients. These are taken up by the comfrey and we use the comfrey leaves as a mulch on the soil near our berry bushes and trees etc. When the leaves rot, the nutrients become available to the berry bushes and trees.

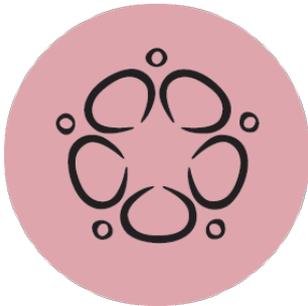
Principle 7: Design from patterns to details



“Can’t see the forest for the trees”

We use stacking in our forest garden - taller trees such as this mulberry are under-planted with slightly shorter bushes (raspberries), which have herbaceous perennials and groundcover plants beneath them (mint and then strawberries). This pattern is repeated throughout the forest garden.

Principle 8: Integrate rather than segregate



“Many hands make light work”

Digging this pond took days of work from many different groups: corporate volunteers from Lloyds bank, year 8 children from Skinner’s Academy and volunteers from ELL. We enjoyed being re-visited by these volunteers every year because they are an important part of who we are and what we do.

Principle 9: Use small and slow solutions



“The bigger they are, the harder they fall” “Slow and steady wins the race”

We propagate plants all year round and gradually give these away to lots of community food growing groups. Propagation can take a while – for example a hardwood cutting taken in November won’t be ready until the September of the following year! But we enjoy making plants for free and they aren’t hard to look after. So far we’ve given away well over 1,000 plants to about 80 food growing projects in London.

Principle 10: Use and value diversity



“Don’t put all your eggs in one basket”

Our forest garden is a type of polyculture because many different edible plants are growing together. This means that we can harvest edible leaves, flowers and berries at many different times during the year. If one plant doesn’t produce much in one year, it doesn’t matter too much as other plants will make up for it. In this bed we have: tree onion, mint, sweet woodruff, oregano (spring) rhubarb, musk mallow flowers, mashua (summer) medlar, garlic (autumn).

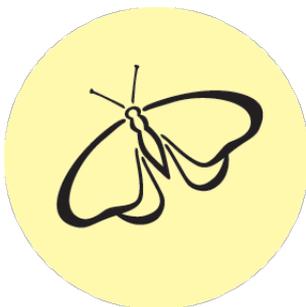
Principle 11: Use edges & value the marginal



“Don’t think you are on the right track just because it’s a well-beaten path”

This edible hedge is an extra source of edible plants. What you might not be able to see, is the row of wooden logs tucked away at the bottom of the fence. These provide a habitat for (amongst others) beetles and fungi which increases the fungal dominance of our soil – perfect when you’re growing perennial plants!

Principle 12: Creatively use and respond to change



“Vision is not seeing things as they are, but as they will be”

We like trying out plants that currently grow well in Mediterranean settings because we can see that our climate is warming up. The microclimate in London is already warm enough to produce fruiting figs, loquats and olives. It would be good if more food growers adopted this experimental approach. It’s worth remembering that ‘native’ plants are only ‘foreign’ plants that thrived in the climate of their day.