

HOW RE-CONNECTING WITH NATURE BEGINS IN THE BACKYARD: WHAT MOTIVATES PEOPLE TO ENGAGE IN SMALL-SCALE ECOLOGICAL DESIGN PROJECTS

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A healthy connection to the environment has many psychological and physical benefits, as well as increasing people's motivation to take environmentally-friendly actions. However, most people are very disconnected from their local ecosystem. This research project focuses on examining the motivations behind engaging in small-scale residential permaculture and landscape design projects, and the benefits to people and their connection to the ecosystem they live in. During my internship with HomeGrown Organics, I interviewed people involved in garden and yard projects around Seattle and Vashon Island, most of whom were past clients of HGO. These semi-structured interviews focused on the experiences of the interviewee with the projects they have been working on, specifically what the primary benefits are, what they have learned, and what permaculture means to them. Common themes across responses included more enjoyable time spent outside, learning about ecosystem processes, and feeling a sense of responsibility and stewardship for the land. However, there was also much variation among the responses, especially regarding what the interviewees' motivations were and the aspects of their projects that ended up being the most valuable to them. These results highlight the need for individualized paths towards connecting with the natural environment that work for each unique situation – the needs, wants, abilities, and limitations of both the people and the land. Looking towards a more sustainable future, engaging in small-scale outdoor design projects such as permaculture is one way in which people can foster a reciprocal relationship with the ecosystem that they are a part of.