



Permaculture Orchard: Beyond Organic DVD recommendations

Posted by [Nick Segner](#)

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[Nick Segner](#)

[Permaculture Orchard: Beyond Organic DVD recommendations](#)

July 31, 2014 02:06AM

Registered: 9 years ago

Posts: 49

Have any of you seen the just-released orcharding docu "The Permaculture Orchard: Beyond Organic"? It features Stefan Sobkowiak of Miracle Farms (over 100 apple varieties) in Canadian zone 5 in Quebec. I got ahold of a copy and watched it twice now. The filmmaking is professional and very visually appealing and there is some good info there, albeit somewhat incomplete.

The trailer is here:

[[youtu.be](#)]

There are things I will take from this film and eventually try to implement (such as NAP sequential planting - nitrogen fixer, apple, plum/pear - to break pest cycles, etc) and there are things I won't copy (such as the use of plastic mulch).

Anyhow, one of the big questions I had off the bat (and received some clarification on from Stefan) is regarding his "training not pruning" technique for dwarf apples. He cites French research and his personal experience with training branches down to 100-120 degree angles, keeping 12-14 per tree and in that way suppressing most vegetative growth which he says eliminated 80% of his pruning work each year... I will begin this new thread [Training Not Pruning for Dwarf Trees](#) in the Pruning forum on this topic for more specific discussion as this alone could change my dwarf pruning workload drastically..

So.. I'd like to start a general discussion on here about this film.

What's your guys' takeaways?

Nick Segner

Wildcat Valley Farm
Zone 8b
Olympic Peninsula Rainshadow
Port Angeles, Washington

Edited 3 time(s). Last edit at 08/02/2014 12:32AM by Nick Segner.

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[Clair Kauffman](#)

[Re: Permaculture Orchard: Beyond Organic DVD recommendations](#)

July 31, 2014 07:23PM

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 22

I just purchased the documentary and have watched about half of it. A few takeaways so far...

1. Overall, I appreciate anyone who is willing to pioneer viable alternatives to conventional orcharding. This is absolutely vital for transition from conventional orcharding, especially for orchardists whose primary income comes from producing and selling fruit.
2. I am fascinated by the multitude of plant species and fruit varieties in his orchard. Does one need a permaculture design certificate and years of experience to be able to optimize placement and spacing of all those plants? Before I would install a planting such as this, I would have many, many questions about rootstock/variety selection and spacing based on my soil, climate, and understory management.
3. Has anyone read Mark Shephard's "Restoration Agriculture"? I'm curious how his approach is similar or differs from Miracle Farms. I know his trees produce mostly nuts, so apples are a relatively small part of his design. Also, Mark integrates animals into his design, so that would have an impact on nutrient supply.

Also hoping to hear from others...

Clair Kauffman
Zone 6b, Lancaster, Pennsylvania

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[Nick Segner](#)

[Re: Permaculture Orchard: Beyond Organic DVD recommendations](#)

August 02, 2014 12:51AM

Clair-

Registered: 9 years ago

Posts: 49

It seems to me implementing the guild plantings Stefan is utilizing would take some practice..

I think you hit the nail on the head: spacing, soil, climate, etc will all greatly affect what would work for you.

In my case, we have inherited an insanely densely planted dwarf apple orchard. Our trees are mostly 2-4 feet apart in the row. Obviously I won't be able to implement a ton of inter-plantings with that kind of spacing. I'm even questioning if comfrey would fit (also it would grow to half the height of the trees themselves!)

I'm pondering a couple things. One is transplanting my dwarf trees out into new rows in order to interplant the N & P trees in my rows. I know that's an S ton of work but not impossible (Finnriver orchard and cidery in Port Townsend here transplanted an entire dwarf orchard!!). Or, as my trees are aging and possibly (either due to age or neglect) are becoming less vigorous I could simply replace waning trees with those new species as it starts to make sense to replace them..

I'd also like to hear any lessons anyone has learned from Mark Shephard. A good friend where I lived in NW WI interned with him but I have yet to glean info.. He makes a mean cider tho!

Nick Segner

Wildcat Valley Farm
Zone 8b
Olympic Peninsula Rainshadow
Port Angeles, Washington

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[Linda Hoffman](#)

[Re: Permaculture Orchard: Beyond Organic DVD recommendations](#)

October 18, 2014 05:44PM

Hi Everyone,

I just saw this conversation and its one I have been having for awhile. And yes, I heard Mark Shepherd speak and read his book --- he's great but the issues are very different in midwest where you have hundreds of acres compared to New England with land much less available and more expensive. As far as apples, he grows standard trees -- and it seems picks what he can reach - mostly for cider -- and lets the the animals have much of the rest. I love his use of the land with so many diverse overlapping activities all being supported and supporting each other.

That said, -- I planted perennials - vegetables and flowers -- herbs, like comfrey, mint, have plenty of nitrogen fixers between my apples trees on 2 1/2 acres --- we put in drip lines last spring that made it possible. I let these strips grow - and the orchard was stunningly beautiful - however -- I didn't realize that I was providing such exquisite habitat for voles and moles. Last winter with heavy snow over the hardware cloth -- we lost fifty trees. The voles simply walked over the snow or justt under the hard layer and nested between the hardware cloth and the trunk. We replanted --- and this summer especially with such a bad crop - I quite ignored the orchard and we didn't mow this strip at all --- now I am weedwacking everything and pulling up miles of vole trails --- Each time put my weedwacker to the ground - moles/voles scatter --- (I had assumed that there was only voles but now I think moles, too) With my quasi permaculture design I've unknowingly created fantastic habitat for these rodents. Maybe that's why Miracle Farms uses plastic mulch? And now that I just planted a new small orchard of 32 Asian Pears -- 4 alternating rows of pears, with some cherries, lingonberries, and other perennials. Clover and wildflowers around each tree --- I sure don't want to be raising rodents instead of fruit.

Thoughts?

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[Todd Parlo](#)

[Re: Permaculture Orchard: Beyond Organic DVD recommendations](#)

October 20, 2014 05:21PM

Linda,

Registered: 10 years ago

Posts: 301

The photos you shared of the damage, I have found, reflect a widespread attack in the northeast. I have been getting emails and comments here at the nursery and countless stories of girdling as far up as 4 feet...by mice/voles. We saw extensive damage here as well, and also lost many hundreds of young nursery trees. It is likely a weather related event, even if the rodent numbers were higher.

But, I completely agree with the complicated discord between wanting to have a companion planted/permaculture/natural plant matrix and maintaining order in the orchard. What I have found, through experience, is that the environment can be rich and useful if they are nearby, but not necessarily right on top of the production crop. Inter-plantings of the said cornucopia of dynamic accumulators, wildflowers and pest suppressors are a great thing to do, but when we have planted them too extensively in the drip-line, it has become a management nightmare. Our farm has been the epicenter of planting things on top of one another, and it is maddening to say the least. Creating habitat for pests like meadow voles, which is likely your culprit (moles are our friendly carnivores), is just one of the problems.

This is why I have been coaching to plant near, not atop the crop. I am liking the island planting we have been putting in place here (zone mulching), mentioned in another post, where the mulch/composting piles between the trees is planted with herbaceous or bush species for beneficials and general orchard soil feeding. This could easily be done as a strip planting between rows of high density trees. This strip might even include a sacrificial crop the rodents will be drawn to. These areas are also one of the places I set my traps (spring traps in coffee cans work nicely).

I am liking more the idea that making some sort of peace with the creatures makes sense. I do still shoot and trap critters, but also find allowing habitat and nourishment for our pests often means they are less of a problem. When they are a problem, this ideal habitat of theirs is a better location for trapping, etc and has not trained them to be directly in the crop zone.

[Walden Heights Nursery & Orchard](#)

Zone 3 in Vermont

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit at 10/20/2014 05:29PM by Todd Parlo.

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