

10 Year Forest Garden Project - 2013 Annual Report



Dr. Chris Warburton Brown

17th June 2014

A longer report on the year's activities is currently being prepared by Tomas Remiarz, this report give a short summary of the key activities undertaken.

What we did

2013 was a busy and fruitful year for the Forest Gardens Project. For the first half of the year, the project was led by Barney Thompson, who worked closely with Chris Warburton Brown (Research Coordinator) and the newly-formed Forest Garden Advisory Group.

At the start of the year, Barney conducted an in-depth survey of all the documents relating to the project produced since its beginning in 2009, and used this to produce a clear statement of 3 aims and 14 objectives to be delivered in the life time of the project (by 2019). This document is attached below.

After some discussion, it was agreed that many questions remained unanswered at this point, particularly the precise research focus of the project. It was felt that a more open-ended and exploratory approach was needed in order to establish the direction of research for year 4 and beyond. Barney therefore used his preparatory work from 2012 and teleconference advice from the Forest Garden Advisory Group to draw up two aims for the the project in 2013;

- (A) Adopt a broad exploratory approach in (i) developing and trialling practicable and usable methodology for capturing yields and (ii) recording other outcomes, in order to guide the remainder of the project*
- (B) Focus on the participants' aspirations, knowledge and experience in informing this process.*

Barney then developed these aims into a work plan that would focus on telephone interviews and site visits to all 10 forest gardens in the project, with an emphasis on collecting data that would shape the future direction of the project. Barney completed all of the telephone interviews and a couple of site visits, but unfortunately he then become unwell and had to leave the project in July.

In September Barney was replaced by Jon Warmington, who had just graduated from Bradford University. In six weeks, Jon was able to visit all but one of the remaining sites and compile detailed site reports. Jon hoped to be able to compile these visit reports into an complete report and draw conclusions about the future of the Forest Gardens Project, but unfortunately the deteriorating health of his grandmother meant that he had to leave to become her full-time

carer. As a result, detailed analysis of the telephone interviews and site visits has not yet been carried out. Tomas Remiarz is currently undertaking this analysis.

In parallel to the Forest gardens project, Tomas was commissioned by Permanent Publications to write a book on the current state of forest gardens both in the UK and internationally. In the second half of the year, he worked with the Association on a survey of forest garden around the world that has had well over hundred respondents to date. In 2014 Tomas is undertaking site visits and more detailed work in preparation for publication in the middle of 2015.

After Jon's departure, the decision was taken to have a 'fallow' year for the Forest Garden Project in 2014. Once analysis of the work undertaken in 2013 has been carried out, and a full report produced, recruitment of a new Forest Garden intern will be undertaken and avenues for further funding will be explored, in preparation for the next phase of the project in year 5 (2015).

What we found out

Focus was on two issues; what the forest gardeners have learned so far and what data the forest gardeners collect. There is a great richness in the detailed responses to the telephone interviews and site visit records, this is only a very brief summary of the key findings.

What the forest gardeners have learned so far

Successes were, in order of frequency mentioned: steady progress of the project, improvement in biodiversity, volunteering, community involvement, educational activities delivered on site including PDCs, mental well-being, good design, creation of micro-climates, little time needed to maintain the garden, creation of a beautiful place to relax.

Weaknesses were, in order of frequency mentioned: lack of time, too many weeds, need to water the trees, wind damaging the trees, rabbits, too little ground preparation before they started planting, not enough mulch, harsh winters damaging the plants, lack of access to site, lack of paths on site, lack of volunteers, planning issues, lack of community involvement, amount of work involved, sourcing the right plants locally.

Current project needs were, in order of frequency mentioned: more time, more money, networking with Permaculture Association and other partners in this project, more volunteers, ecological surveys.

Recommendations for new forest garden practitioners were:

- don't be too ambitious in the size of your site. Smaller projects are easier to manage
- make sure your site has an adequate means of irrigation
- decent ground preparations and windbreaks help the progress of the site in the long term
- black sheeting prevent weeds from re-establishing themselves following natural fertilisers
- think about fencing and how to make it as long lasting and sturdy as possible
- ensure there is adequate protection from rabbits and other pests

- start with your windbreaks.
- have a good balance between complexity and simplicity. Ecosystems can be very complex but management of ecosystems is easier the simpler they are.
- ensure good ground preparations, do not rush into planting
- put in ground covering canopy early on to ensure weeds cannot re-establish themselves
- ensure correct spacing is achieved for when the trees are fully mature
- budget properly as trees are expensive
- source plants locally or relocate plants from other areas of the site
- join Forest Gardens Network

its all in the design - understand the land and micro-climates of the site and plan accordingly

- work from patterns and designs
- designate an area of the site for growing and generating living mulch
- the android app iGeology provides information on local bedrock and soil etc.
- windfinder.com provides data on wind in your area

What data the forest gardens currently collect

Data collection by the different forest gardens is not consistent. Some records are being kept, but in differing areas and in different ways. However all of the projects expressed a willingness to keep records, especially on yields, if given a clear format for this. Most of the projects also have extensive photo records of site development and all have a baseline survey of soil and biodiversity.

	Bride well	Oak Tree	Black Mount	Riflem an	Kers well	Subur ban	Stepn ey	Edible s	Stewa rd	Quadr angle
Accounts	n	y	y	n	n	n	y	y	y	n
Sales of edibles	y	n	n	n	n	n	y	y	n	n
Sales on non-edibles	y	n	n	n	n	n	y	y	n	n
Purchases of edibles	y	y	y	y	y	n	y	y	y	y
Purchase of non-edibles	y	y	y	y	n	n	n	y	y	y
Visitor income	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	y
Event income	n	n	n	n	n	n	y	n	n	y
Staff/vol expenses	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	y
Staff/vol hours	y	n	y	y	n	n	y	y	y	y
Visitors	n	y	y	n	n	n	n	y	n	y
Event type	n	y	y	n	n	n	y	n	n	y
Accredited learning	n	n	y	n	n	n	n	y	n	n
B/diversity	n	n	y	n	n	n	n	n	y	y
Soil	y	y	n	n	y	n	y	n	y	y
Inputs	y	y	n	n	n	n	y	n	y	n
Outputs	n	n	n	n	n	n	y	n	y	n
Amount of edibles	y	n	n	y	n	n	n	n	n	n
Amount of non-edibles	y	n	n	y	n	n	n	n	n	n
Funding applications	n	n	n	n	n	n	y	n	n	n
Journal etc.	y	n	y	n	n	n	n	n	n	blog
Other	photos	Photos design	Site plan			photos	photos	designs	photos	archive

Summary of Overall Ten-year Aims and Objectives

Barney Thompson 22/02/13

This document compiles the various documents pertaining to the Permaculture Association's aims and objectives for the Forest Gardens Trials. These will be used to guide the methodology developed in order to achieve them. These are the 10-year aims for the full duration of the project.

Aims

- *To improve the ability of the Permaculture Association, project participants and other forest gardens practitioners to design and undertake research into forest gardens systems. (C, D)*
- *Through the process of achieving the above, to better enable project participants and other forest gardens practitioners to achieve their personal goals. (C)*
- *To improve understanding of forest garden systems in different social settings. (C, D)*

Objectives

	Objective	Source	Achievable	Comments
1	<i>Investigate diversity and abundance of a wide range of yields (social, environmental, productive, economic) in different social settings over time</i>	A, C, D, E	Yes	Big enough sample size for 'different social settings'? 'Appreciative enquiry' approach in year 3.
2	<i>Investigate biodiversity impacts</i>	A, B, C, D	Yes	Tests to be developed by Tom and trialled in year 3.
3	<i>Investigate impacts on soil quality</i>	A, B, C, D	Yes	Tests to be developed by Tom and trialled in year 3.
4	<i>Record perceived benefits and aspirations and compare these with actual (quality and quantity of) yields</i>	A, C, D, E	Yes	Testing assumptions (their original motivation, their impressions of current state of FG etc.). Both practitioners and other participants.
5	<i>Explore methods to investigate overall input:output ratio (compared to other types of gardens)</i>	A, B, C	Yes	Investigate feasibility of methods - exploratory.
6	<i>Methods of recording yields investigated in year 3 and effective methods developed for year 5</i>	E	Yes	Amended from original objectives, more exploratory approach adopted earlier on.
7	<i>Involve practitioners in the design of the research project at all stages</i>	C	Yes	Ensure practitioners' questions and aspirations are addressed and their expertise and methods best utilised, starting in year 3.
8	<i>Develop effective and user friendly research methodologies</i>	E	Yes	Based on year 3 approach.
9	<i>Projects define their own goals</i>	E	Yes	Fitting in with ours.

	<i>for year 10</i>			
10	<i>Obtain learning outcomes and develop hypotheses at both operational research and project management levels</i>	<i>Teleconferen ce</i>	Yes	Social, environmental, productive and economic yields at each level.
11	<i>Gain better understanding of which planting and maintenance patterns lead to high yields</i>	E	Yes	Largely anecdotal/qualitative? expertise from various practitioners.
12	<i>Ongoing communication of research progress</i>	E	Yes	Liaise regularly with RAB working group and participants. Share and discuss results with wider network (e.g. Martin Crawford).
13	<i>Facilitate participatory design of a long term FG research project, with outcomes at both operational research and project management levels</i>	<i>C, D</i>	Yes	See 6 - extend to larger scale follow up projects and scope funding.
14	<i>A participative approach to researching complex cropping systems using FG's as an example in place and we can evaluate its effectiveness</i>	E	Yes	See 6/7 - extend to other poly-culture systems.

Note:

These documents can be found in:

CURRENT/Research/Forest_Garden_trials/2_FG_research_overview/1_Project Aims and Objectives

For reference they are as follows:

(A) Research questions 12-03-20.doc

(B) Research questions 12-02-29.doc

(C) Forest Gardens Project Summary.doc

(D) Aims and Objectives_v2.odt

(E) Aims and Objectives.doc

(F) Forest Garden Project Research questions.doc

The projects

- **Oak Tree Low Carbon Farm**, nr. Ipswich/ Commercial, 2.5 acres, part of a 12 acre CSA site.
- **Bridewell**, Barnstaple, Devon/ Commercial. 0.5 acres, part of 11 acre site w/ commercial orchard
- **Black Mountain Development Project**, Southfield School, Bradford/ Community, 8 acres beside schools
- **Rifleman Cottage**, Faversham, Kent/ Private, 0.33 acres as part of 6 acre woodland site including a commercial orchard
- **Kerswell Forest garden**, Cullompton, Devon/ Private, 3 acre FG,
- **Residential Suburban Garden**, Ilford, Essex/ Private, 2 adjacent back gardens
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- **Stepney City Farm**, Stepney, London/ Community, 0.25 acre on 2 acre city farm.
- **Edibles**, West Slaithwaite, Huddersfield/ Community
- **Steward Community Woodland**, Moretonhampstead, Devon/ Private, 0.33 acre in a 32 acre woodland, not visited
- **The Quadrangle**, Shoreham, Kent/ Community, 2 acre site, not visited

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