Activity 1: Traditional vs permaculture approaches

Description

The activity consists of looking at some of the most characteristic techniques and means of traditional agronomy and relating them to their impacts and consequences for the vegetable garden. Permaculture alternatives are then presented in order to compare the two approaches to agronomy.

Teaser

Title: Soil health

Summary: Learn about the needs of plants to make the best use of your garden space.

Text: At first sight, a permaculture garden may seem a bit messy, but in reality there is a lot of planning involved. For example, when it comes to distributing the plants in the garden, we can make better use of the space if we know the sunlight needs of each plant and thus reserve the shaded areas for the less demanding ones. In case you don't find your plant in the list, you can be guided by this saying “If you grow ii for the fruit, it needs full sun. If you grow it for the leaves, partial sun is all you need.”

Photos/Images

http//:www.thegardeningcook.com

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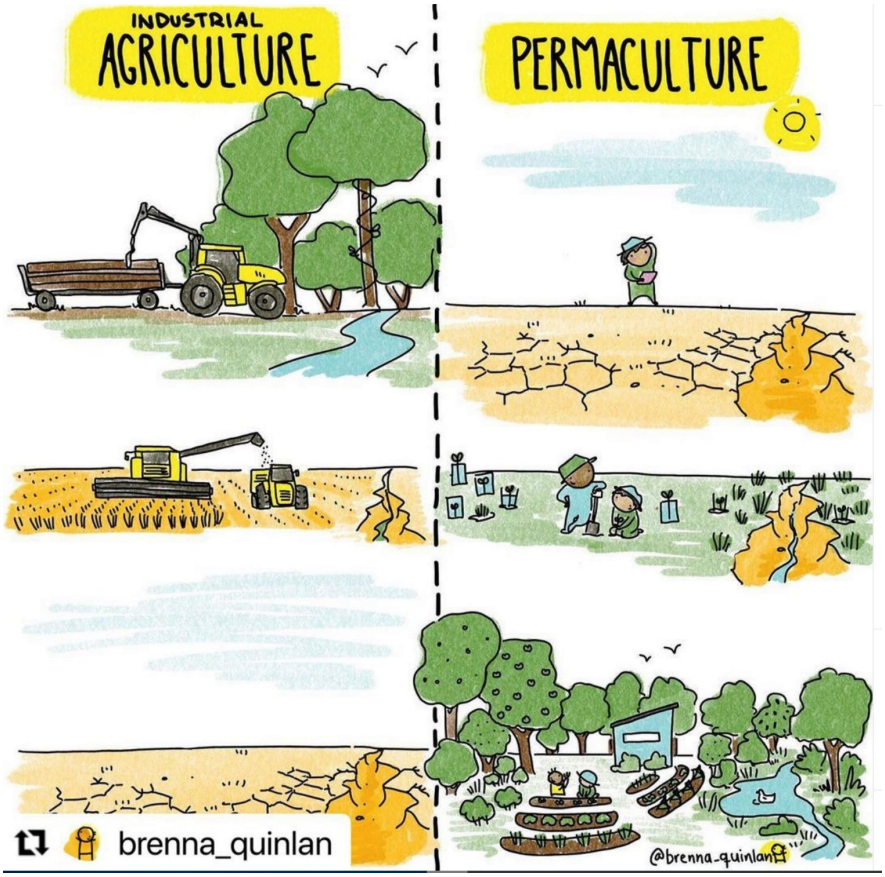
Competences addressed

- Knowledge about benefits of permaculture.
- Knowledge about the most common techniques of permaculture.
- Communication
- Learning to learn

Learning objectives



- To reflect on the uses of external inputs in traditional agronomy.
- To learn about the environmental impact of some of the most commonly used inputs in traditional agronomy.
- To learn about some of the most common uses of plants in permaculture.
- To learn how to use one's own crops to get an added yield from them within the garden system.

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Preparation for the activity

- Print and cut out the cards provided in annexes 3, 4 and 5. (We recommend to print them on a coloured paper, different for each document and double side)
- Prepare a table for each working group you are going to form.
- Place craft paper on each of the tables.
- Draw the columns to be filled in:
    1. conventional agronomy techniques,
    2. benefits and impacts and
    3. permaculture techniques.

The activity / the content

It is important to clarify that each type of production uses the means and resources of the other. When we speak of predominant traditional agronomy, we do not mean that traditional farmers do not also use some means of organic farming, such as crop rotation or organic fertilizers, traditional seeds, etc. It is important to emphasize this, especially for those participants who may be offended by simplifying their way of working.

1. Introduce the topic:

    To this day, conventional agronomy is based on the use of inputs to improve crop productivity (fertilizers, phytosanitary products, tillage machinery), which, in most cases, come from outside the plot. These supplements are highly effective during the first years of use. However, their long-term use results in a system that is increasingly dependent on external inputs, with the consequent economic cost and environmental impact (soil erosion, reduction of soil microbiota, contamination of aquifers).

    It is therefore necessary to look for new forms of production that are more resilient and make use of the garden's own products, to achieve a system that, although it means waiting a few seasons until it is effective, in the long term is more efficient and, undoubtedly, more environmentally friendly.We are going to compare some aspects of traditional agronomy with permaculture starting with the most basic approaches: objectives, needs of the garden and means to achieve them.

2. Ice-breaker:

In a circle, ask every participant to think and express through mime, one activity that is used in conventional agronomy. The rest of the participants shall guess what the mime refers to.

3. Divide the participants in groups of 4-5 people. Assign a table for each group. And give them the cards.

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4. On each table there should be a piece of paper (the bigger the better, depending on the possibilities of the class). The paper will have a table with three columns drawn on it, with the headings:

- Resources and techniques of conventional agronomy
- Benefit, impact and consequences
- Resources and techniques of permaculture

Predominant conventional agronomy		Permaculture
Resources and means	Impact and consequences	Resources and means

5. Give the groups the first and the second fist of cards, that corresponds to the first and the second header: *Resources and techniques of conventional agronomy* and *Benefit, impact and consequences.*

Ask them to read the cards and match each technique with its impact using the table. If they do not understand any of the techniques, they can read the definitions on the other side, or, if it is not possible to print the cards double-sided, on a separate sheet of paper.

6. When they finish task 5, give them the third group of cards, corresponding to *Resources and techniques of permaculture.* Ask them to put them in the table matching the conventional techniques they are an alternative for.

7. If a group is well motivated and they finish soon enough, you can ask them to write a fourth column with some of the benefits and impacts of permaculture techniques they can deduce.

8. Have a debriefing to check the results. The aim is not to correct mistakes of wrong matches, but to allow participants to share what they have learned. Ask each group to name one thing that stood out to them and to name one benefit of permaculture that they learned from the activity.

9. In Annex 5 you can find the table with solutions, in case you want to print them or if anybody asks for it.

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Questions for reflection, self-assessment and conclusions

- How would you summarize the advantages of permaculture in one sentence?
- What are its disadvantages?
- Which practices would be easily exportable to other types of agronomy and would have a big impact?

Recommendations on how to adapt to different target groups

- Add pictures on the cards for disadvantaged groups that are not used to read a lot.
- Make a big panel with the whole group, ask each participant to read one card and place it in order.

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