

Simple Gifts Forest Garden



In this time of global climate change , the end of cheap oil, and growing economic instability and inequity, we wonder; *how can we begin to live differently on the earth?*

At Dayspring Earth Ministry, along with others, we are exploring this question as we build an earth ministry teaching and learning center called Simple Gifts. Two small, energy efficient staff cottages, a solar heated greenhouse, and annual gardens have already been built. Our next project is the Simple Gifts Forest Garden.

In the Simple Gifts Forest Garden we create an array of perennial plants that mirror the natural forest habitats of our bioregion: shady woodlands and mid-successional open savannah, old field mosaic, and mini-thicket. The garden attracts beneficial insects and birds and contains a diversity of plants that make the garden as self-maintaining as possible.

In the garden we learn how to produce food in a thriving, natural plant community that demonstrates and teaches what forest gardening and permaculture can accomplish. The garden produces a variety of fresh vegetables, fruits, berries, and nuts in all seasons, and all of us share in this harvest.

The design of the forest garden as a whole integrates the forest garden with the greenhouse, cistern, tool shed, mulch and compost piles, annual vegetable beds, patio, enclosed, quiet sitting area, and a vehicle access area to bring in materials.

We choose the species in the garden based on their ability to fit a specific niche regardless of region of origin, although we go out of our way to incorporate underutilized eastern natives. We put in some extra work to grow apples and stone fruits, although most of our emphasis is on resilient “pest proof” species. We employ an approach to pests and disease that is based primarily on natural and organic methods of control.

As people work in garden and greenhouse, walk on its garden paths, and sit in its restful little “outdoor rooms,” they experience a soulful connection with a landscape that is alive and abundant, wild and delicious.