

# Transforming A Suburban Property

## Half of all Americans live in suburbia

It is a core icon of the American way of life. Suburbia means employment for tens of millions of People. It is vital to our economy as we know it.

A pie chart of the greatest challenges and uncertainties of our time - the economy, environment, resources, climate change, global relations, our culture; would show Suburbia and its close companion, the automobile, to be major shareholders of that pie chart.

It's clear to a growing number of people that we can no longer afford suburbia in terms of cost to the environment, resource availability, global relations, climate change and culture.

Still, suburbia has many assets to work with. There is sun, water, soil, useful skills and an enormous opportunity for positive human potential to rise to the occasion.

## Permaculture is a powerful tool

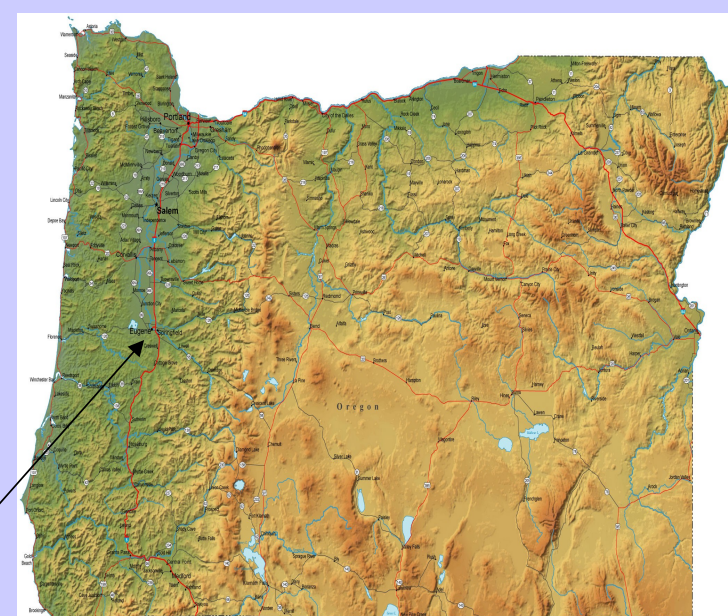
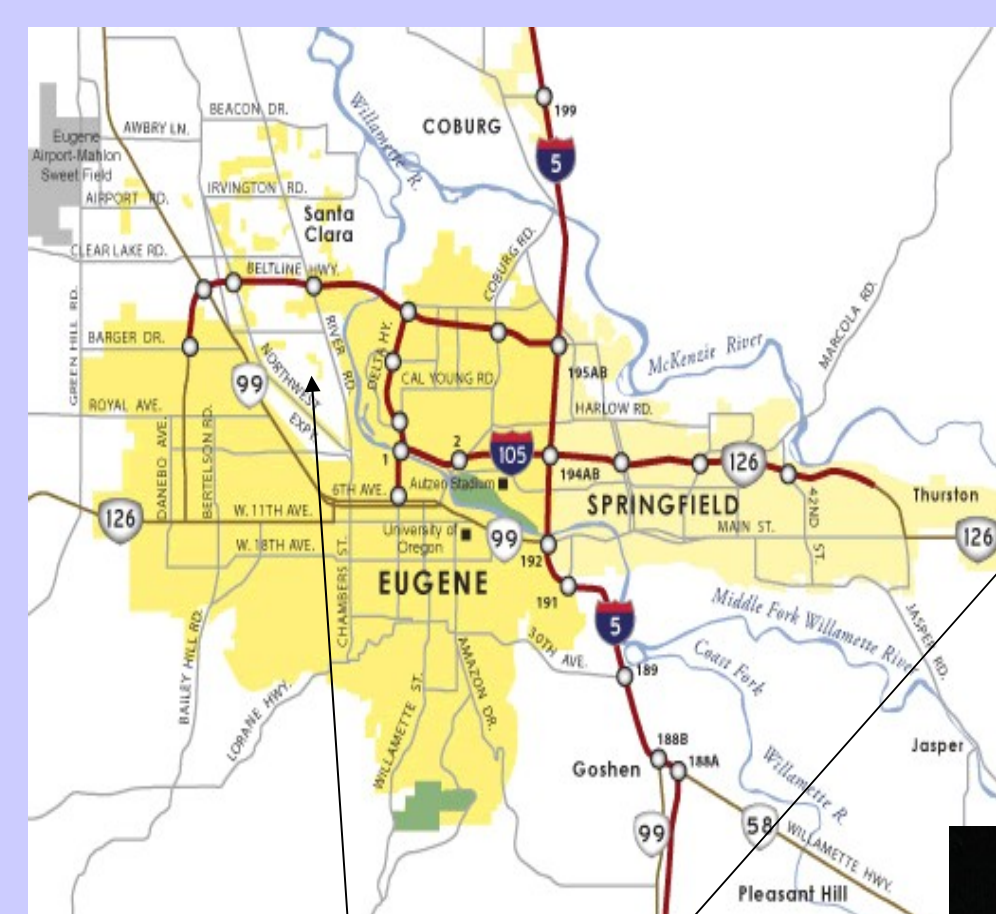
One of its most basic ideals is to create a thoughtful design for a given need that leads to multiple benefits. Another ideal of Permaculture is to make good use of existing assets in ways that are friendly to people and planet.

Making use of permaculture values and ideals for transforming a suburban property is a perfect fit. Suburbia is already here and a specific site often features many attributes that can be a great value to its own transformation.

This poster will be a show and tell of one ongoing experience in Eugene, for transforming a suburban property. As you read the text and see the photos, be thinking about how you might make changes where you live. And also keep in mind the impressive variety of benefits, social, economic, environmental, personal.

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Suburban site

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The Site Is Northwest of Downtown Eugene, Oregon in the south Willamette Valley. The neighborhood has an agricultural history but is now mostly subdivided and suburban.

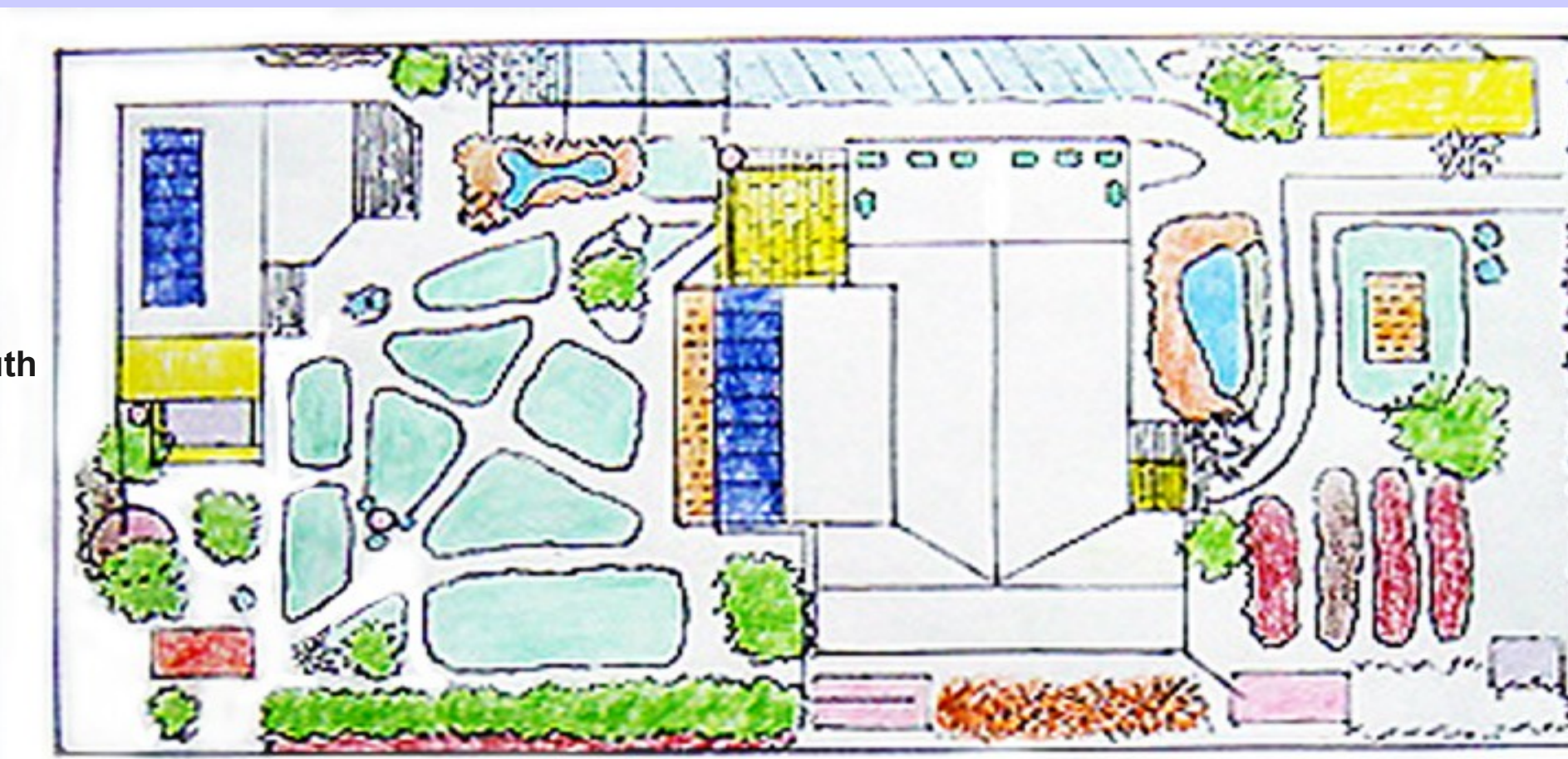
The house is mid fifties vintage, 1400 ft. sq. The lot is ¼ acre with the back yard on the south side of the house.

Solar access is very good. The soil is alluvial Malabon, the Willamette River a quarter mile away. A bike path along the river is the primary access to town.

Nearby River Road had neighborhood stores until 25 years ago. Street widening in 1992 to facilitate more traffic has damaged the character of the neighborhood.

Owners of a remnant nursery across the street have subdivided the three acres and are building new houses. Within a five minute bike ride, there are at least ten properties with permaculture plans.

## A Powerful Action Available to Millions - Transforming a Suburban Property



- Under Cover
- Vegetable Garden
- Fruit and Nut Trees
- Passive Solar
- Water Features
- Coldframes
- Water Tanks
- Brambles
- Kiwi, Grapes
- Compost
- Habitat
- Bamboo
- Blueberries
- Chickens
- Roof Garden
- Food Forest



Carport south wall, 2000



Carport south wall after remodel



Driveway, 2000



Driveway, 2010

## Reclaiming Automobile Space

High priority for transforming suburbia is reclaiming Automobile space. There are over 250 million passenger vehicles in the US. The roads, parking lots, freeways - paved for automobiles add up to an enormous amount of acreage, by one estimate equal in size to the state of Georgia. Our urban areas, culture, economy and foreign policy are dominated by cars.

This property had space to park five cars. Removing the driveway was straight forward. Basic tools are a cement saw, 2 inch cement chisel, ten lb sledge, five foot metal pry bar and a 4x4 block of wood for a fulcrum. Score the concrete only an inch deep. Put the chisel in the score, hit the chisel with the sledge, the concrete cracks, mostly along the score and the pry bar loosens and lifts the blocks for removal.

Turning a garage into a living space is common. For this project, the new space became a bedroom, increasing the residential density of the house.

Reclaiming auto space makes room to grow food, improves on site water conditions and aesthetics, compacts the human habitation and is a powerful action on behalf of ecological culture change.



Front Yard - Cardboard and Compost 2000



Front yard, same view 2010



Backyard at move in, 2000



Backyard, same view 2010

## Grass to Garden

Trading grass for garden was one of the first actions on site. There are several approaches- sheet mulching is a good one. Cardboard is spread over the grass, then organic material is piled on top - leaves, compost, grass clippings, manure. Over the winter, the grass is suffocated. The decayed material is then pulled aside, the dead sod can be removed and a garden begun.

Other methods for ridding the grass include covering it with black plastic in the summer and cooking it or slicing the top several inches of sod with a broad shovel or turf cutting machine and removing.

Front yards are particularly good for gardens, its open to the street and becomes a great way to meet neighbors, create safety & show what is possible with a suburban property.



Moving a 1600 gal tank



3000 gallon tank in place with the bungalow



50 gal barrel, close to sun room container plants



Water flows from roof to tanks

## Rain Water Catchment

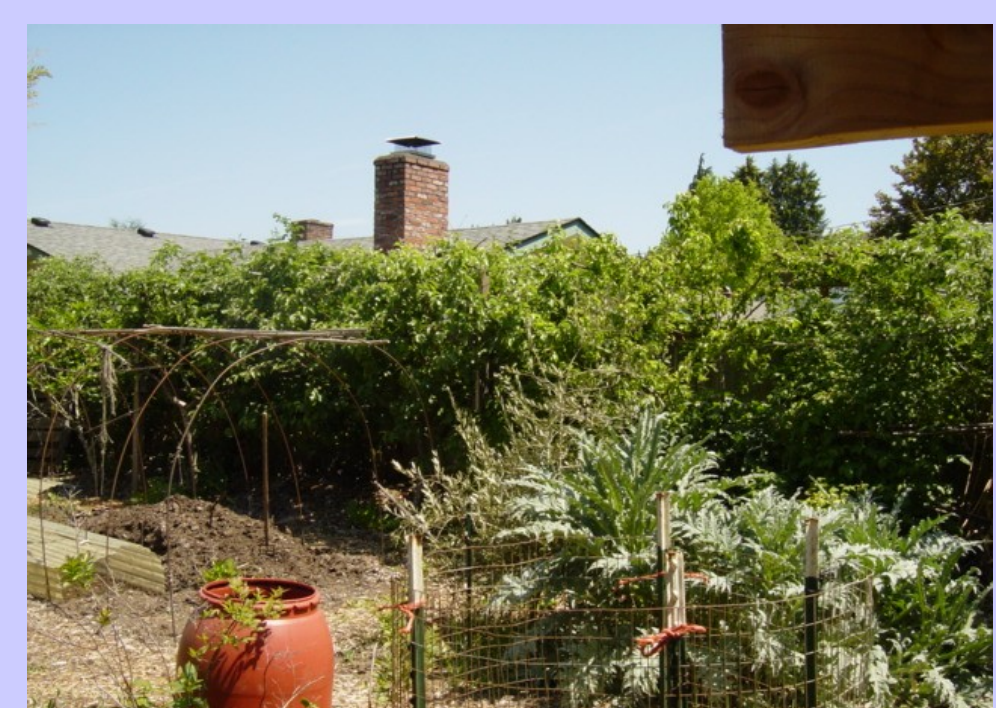
Catching and storing rain water on site is fun, strategic and its just common sense. Whether one is concerned about earthquakes, storms or human caused disruptions storing water is a smart idea.

There are a number of different kinds of collection containers including polyethylene, ferro cement, metal, fiber glass and flexible bladders. Most home systems are for outside use only but potable systems can be built using rainwater as well.

A simple equation about rainfall is useful. One inch of rain on 1000 square feet comes to 550 gallons. How much can be stored at what rate depends on size of tank and size of collection surface. My 1600 gal tanks can fill 5 or 6 times during the winter. The 3000 gal tank maybe twice. The place is off the grid for outdoor water needs.

Installing the rain water system at the beginning of a property transformation is good planning.

Seeing a tank fill and then empty with use makes for a much closer relationship with a vital resource. It makes what we use far more tangible and its a good metaphor when considering so many other products, services and resources we use but have little idea of how they were produced and where they came from.



East side food hedge



Work party prepares for food forest

## Fencelines

Every property has boundary lines and they offer a great location for food production.

The upper picture on the left shows a food hedge. There are wire lines with support structures along the fence. Four apple trees, two pears and a fig create a hedge, pruned and shaped using the wires. Domestic black berries are planted between the trees and fence. Its a productive design.

The bottom foto shows where a huge laurel hedge was removed. The work party is helping prepare the fence line for a food forest- a thoughtfully designed arrangement of edible and medicinal shrubs, ground cover and small trees.

On the other side of the fence, the neighbor has planted plums and will train them along wires. Food production on both sides of the fence.



Inside the sunroom.



Above the sunroom. Note glass and galvalume roofing.



South side of the house, note- cold frames, solar water



Solar space - the bungalow

## Solar Works

Making use of solar energy is a big part of transforming a suburban property. It works in Eugene, Oregon so it is applicable far more widely than is currently made use of.

The site's 350 ft sq sun room has glass walls - 25 feet south facing, 8 feet east and ten feet west facing. There is 150 ft sq of glass in the ceiling. All together, the sun room helps heat the house to a very useful degree while uplifting the spirit. The sun room never freezes.

The solar water heater takes care of hot water on its own for almost six months out of the year and provides a boost even in the cloudy winter.

The growing season is extended with cold frames, that's more food grown on site. One can cook with the sun one can dry fruit and veggies with the sun. Solar works.



## Compost and Chickens

Soil fertility is an essential part of transforming a property. Animals have an important role to play along with making much more effective use of human waste.

Chickens can be working pets. They cultivate the soil, eat unwanted pests in the garden, create a pleasant rural ambience in the suburban environment, produce eggs to eat and poop for soil fertility. There are other micro livestock for suburbia as well.



Low hanging fruit



Seed Saving - A Vital Skill



Storage Keepers - Winter Squash, Walnuts, Onions



Back Yard - Veggies, Fruit, New Food Forest



Bungalow

## Bungalow

The bungalow has become a core part of this transformation project. Its a place to work, relax, live. A shed in terminal decline gave way to this rustic modern structure.

The bungalow is a nice example. How our surroundings can uplift mood, creativity and productivity.

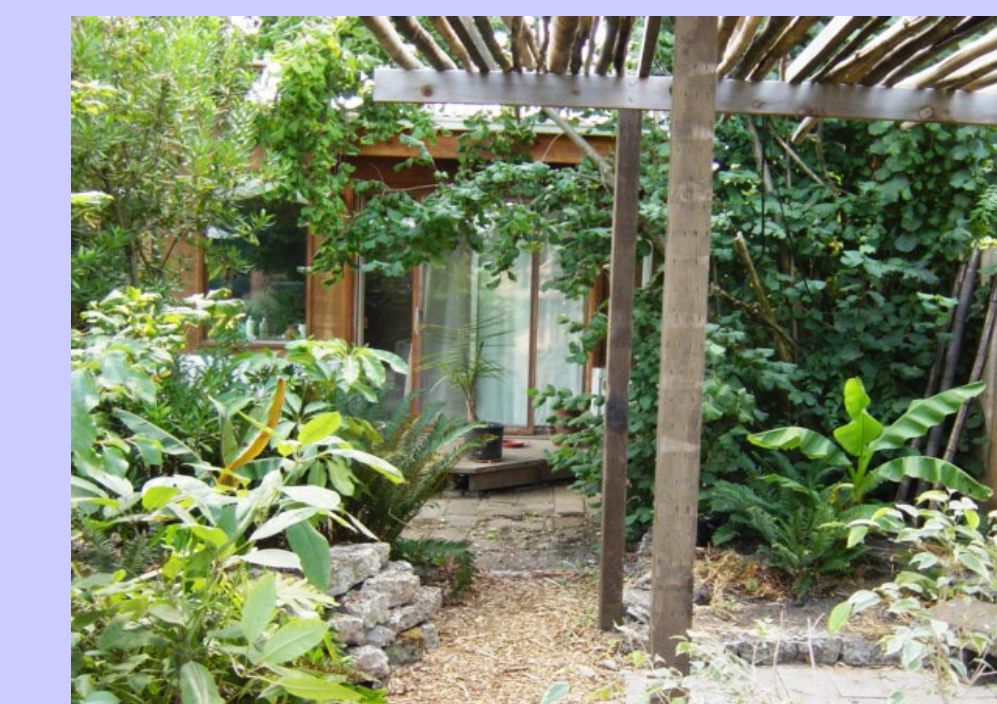


Backyard water feature and habitat

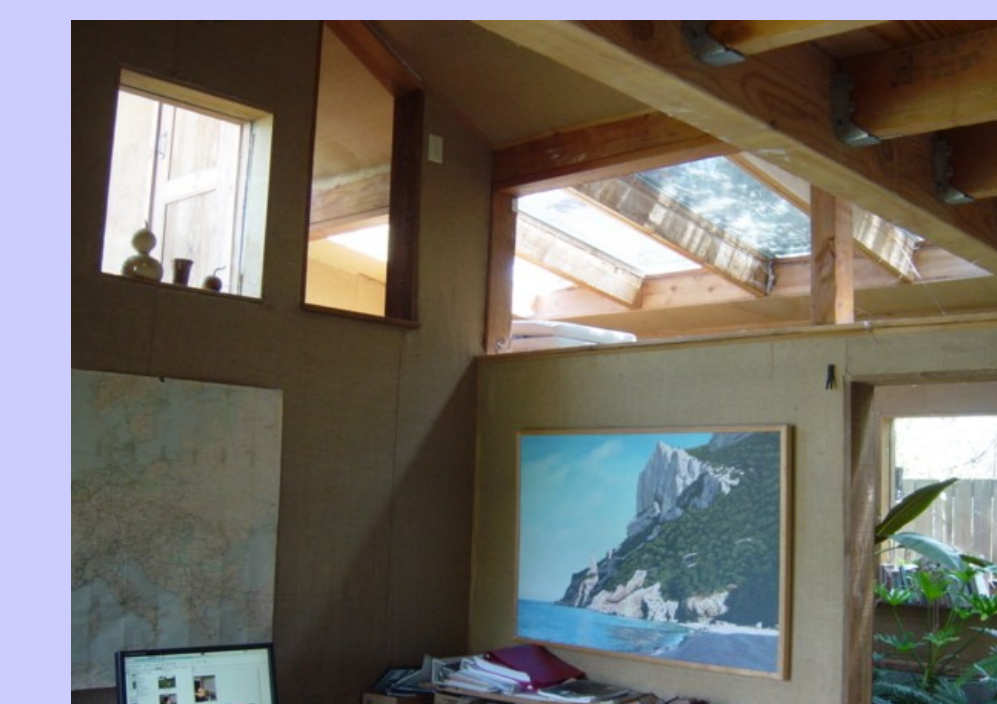
## Water Features/Habitat

Two water features with native plants create a refuge for birds, snakes and kindred critters. Each has a small gravity waterfall. Both have chunks of former driveway as attractive borders and edges.

There is something magic about a reflection and ripples on water, even in small scale.



Habitat and future grape arbor



Inside the bungalow, rustic contemporary design

## Aesthetics, Culture, Economy

This project, to transform a suburban property, is intended to show what a suburban property can become and it includes a well defined set of values and ideals. Growing and storing food, using solar energy and catching rain water is only part of the story.

The ideal is to downsize and localize, to use fewer and lesser amounts of resources and to make better use of what is close at hand for living in a more peaceful way that planet Earth can more likely accommodate.

From the start, the intention has been to make the place aesthetically attractive and uplifting to the spirit. A core ideal is to be creative in design and slow down the pace of life to have time to enjoy what that creativity has brought into being.

To see the fotos on this poster, and to visit the site, its easy to appreciate this place has a very different sense of values, aesthetics and priorities. The values that guide this project and lifestyle, visible here, are the same that can form the basis of a much broader shift in culture. Using one's imagination, one can upsize and extrapolate the values and changes here to the neighborhood, community and bio regional scale. A healthy culture can be the base for deep changes in our economy and world view. Imagine an economy that existed to serve the values, goals and ideals of an uplifted culture.



Neighborhood meeting includes green and local



Green home bike tours



Visitors see a different kind of suburbia



One transformation deserves another

## Creating a Platform

This project takes place at an edge between two deeply contrasting periods of history. One of care less adolescent self absorption, the other a maturing sense of where humans fit within the natural world, their own potential for uplift and destiny. The choices are fascinating, profound and ready to be made.

A single suburban property can become a powerful contribution to maturing our species. Front yard gardens, in particular, offer a place to meet, greet and make common cause with our neighbors for a safer, more secure and healthier way of life. A public expression of an uplifted set of values and culture encourages others to do the same. The more the better.

An ideal of permaculture is to design for multiple benefits and transforming a suburban property can enhance personal and community uplift, public health, safety and security, environmental well being and peace on Earth.

Many people have been to this place and many have made use of their visit. The place makes real and visible the ideals of a different culture and economy. A suburban transformation becomes a very timely platform to help make the changes history calls for.

## Impressive Benefits

