

# Shelton-Mason County Journal - Dedicated to the citizens of Mason County, Washington since 1886

## Convergence season

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By Alex Féthière



David Ahlgren (right) explaining swale excavation techniques at the NWPCC in 2018, Camp Singing Wind, Toledo, WA.  
(Alex Fethiere)

A permaculture convergence was my introduction to Cascadia. One of the best ways to hit the ground running is two to three days of immersion in a conference assembling many of the people and pursuits situated in a bioregion.

The stated aim, according to the Northwest Permaculture Convergence, is to bring hundreds of diverse people together to share their approaches to "designing living environments, economic systems, and culture practices that thrive within ecologically sustainable limits." Convergences also model those plans in miniature, with impromptu housing, barter systems, and shared rituals of cooperation and inclusion.

Port Townsend hosted the 2016 Northwest Permaculture Convergence. The NWPCC has been held annually for 14 years, alternating venues between Oregon and Washington. There are a couple of

different convergences, like the Inland Northwest Permaculture Guild, which gathers people from between the Cascades and the Rockies, and the Northern California Permaculture Convergence.

Smaller meetups often take place to deliver specific à la carte workshops, like establishing a food forest or digging earthworks. Work parties are ad hoc aggregations of people directed toward a given purpose.

Meetups and work parties can take place within a convergence, like the blueberry planting work party planned for the NWPCC's upcoming convergence from October 15-17 at Sahale in Tahuya. Volunteers and students on a gap year tour of regenerative farms will establish a blueberry patch with proper soil moisture and pH to self-sustain.

This will involve earthworking: re-routing water that flows down the patch's planned site. The permaculture directive of in-ground water storage, "slow, spread, and sink it" entails digging swales to harness the runoff for the blueberry patch.

Swales, trenches on contour that redistribute water flow along slopes, can be dug by one person in an excavator or teams with shovels. They are a classic example of a workshop (led by an instructor) that may instead be a work party (collaboratively coordinated).

Normally a convergence involves presenters and schedules overlapping in a highly structured latticework of time and place. A gridded bulletin board tells attendees who is where and when, and one struggles to fit in eating and socializing around courses.

The NWPCC is taking a different tack in 2021, after offering a virtual convergence last year amid the pandemic. This approach, which they characterize as horizontal and nonhierarchical, invites participants to a more round-table convergence.

Familiar presenters such as David Ahlgren, earthworks instructor, will be present and working, but not "on the clock," as it were. He will be involved in the blueberry project, guiding hand-tool earthworking. When I learned earthworks from David at the 2018 Convergence hosted at Camp Singing Wind in Toledo, some of his best advice came from a chat after class.

It sounds like this convergence will embrace that casual and cooperative space. It will be interesting to see how people navigate it according to customary practices, and how new arrivals will find their footing.

For more information, go to <http://www.northwestpermaculture.org>, <http://www.facebook.com/NWPCC>, <https://www.instagram.com/northwestpermaculture>, or attend weekly meetings on Zoom. Meeting information is on the organization's website - maybe I'll see you there!

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