

## Earth Activist Training by Layne Whitley

Certainly the highlight of this May was participating in the Earth Activist Training instructed by Starhawk, internationally renowned author/activist, and permaculture superstar, Penny Livingston-Stark. This amazing two-week residential course was extremely rigorous with classes, lectures, and hands-on workshops from morning until 10:00 or 11:00 at night. The tight schedule was never a problem because the more we learned, the more we craved.

We wanted to take in as much information as possible from these inspiring teachers, who combined a fundamental permaculture design course with training in effective political action, grounding it all in personal and spiritual expansion. Starhawk was instrumental in facilitating the activism and spiritual components of the program. Her eloquent book, *Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising*, illustrated her complete involvement in the peace movement and protests around the world, while her most famous book, *The Spiral Dance*, was crucial in sparking the international revival of earth-based, Goddess-centered spirituality since the eighties.

Her experience in the peace movement is extensive and sobering; in fact, she had returned only the day before our program from recent activist work in Palestine, where two protesters were shot in the head and one was run over by a bulldozer by the Israeli army. Only one survived and is in serious condition. She worked with us over the course of two weeks to develop the basics of political organizing, strategy, and direct action, as well as consensus, facilitation, and conflict resolution. We not only learned ways to stay grounded under stress, renew personal energy, and avoid burnout, but also how to create rituals and personal spiritual practice. In this way we were taught how to weave "magic" (ie: intention) into powerful action.



Creating a very big pond

Penny Livingston-Stark incorporated the essential elements of permaculture. According to the Permaculture Institute of California web site, "Permaculture" is a practical set of ecological design principles and methods for human settlements which can be applied to urban, suburban, and watershed scale. Permaculture principles provide a way of thinking that enables people to establish highly productive environments that provide for food, energy, shelter, and other material and non-material needs. These principals are rooted in careful observations of natural ! patterns and can be applied to all climates and a wide variety of cultures, from indigenous to technological." But beyond the practical applications of permaculture, these principles are essentially a study of all the tangible ways you can pull yourself out of the paradigm we are currently stuck in as a world community. And that inspiring concept, folks, is the ultimate point of the Earth Activist Training.

Thus, the greatest lesson I took from this program was that in order to truly change the world, we must first create the world we wish to live in. Rather than trying to force the system to change from within, permaculture strives to create a new system that we can step into and adapt as our own; we are creating a new option. This very notion can be perceived by observing how nature itself works. Ecological systems constantly work to preserve and maintain balance. This is also reflected in social and political systems; we have structures and ideologies that maintain our status quo. However, it is at the edges that most change occurs (whether from the ocean's edge or by new, revolutionary ideas and movements).



Weaving floating island for very big pond