



Looking for frogs in the pond is a favorite activity of guests at the B & B.

Listening to the Landscape

Just down the road from Stelle is a beautifully kept two-story house surrounded by trees and a lush garden of vegetables and flowers. The Greenhouse Bed and Breakfast, owned and operated by Mark and Guia Hoffman, is affiliated with the Center for Sustainable Community—not for its guest rooms, but for the methods in permaculture being practiced on its grounds.

“Permaculture is one approach to sustainable agriculture,” says Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant, research specialist with the Agroecology/Sustainable Agriculture Program at the University of Illinois. “It



A ring of garlic grows around the base of a fruit tree.

aims to create a system that is economically viable, ecologically sound and socially responsible, but its underlying ethic is one of harmony with nature, abandoning the idea that humans have superiority over the natural world.”

As Mark Hoffman moves from one tree or shrub to another, he describes some of the ongoing experiments he and his wife Guia conduct on their property and the choices they’ve made through incorporating permaculture methods. It has resulted in some rather unusual landscaping. For example, around the base of each fruit tree, one or more vegetables are planted, and garlic grows in a ring around the pear tree to keep the borer population down. Mark says that although permaculture isn’t a method of organic gardening, similar principles come into play. If he and Guia

run into pest problems, they find natural ways like the garlic to deal with them rather than using chemicals.

Around a large cherry tree are planted three concentric circles—broccoli closest to the trunk, then cabbage, then asparagus. It’s another experiment. Mark has planted the ring of asparagus right at the “drip line” of the tree branches so that the asparagus sprouts will get more water than if they had been planted closer to the trunk, under the canopy. Mark likes these circular vegetable gardens because space is used more efficiently. What would otherwise stretch out to be a 50-foot garden strip fits compactly under the cherry tree.

Another tree sits in the center of a ring of oregano and eggplant. Mark liked the Italian theme of sorts. He finds enjoyment in the creativity and the experimentation of permaculture. One area smack in the middle of the front yard became a problem location, with nothing wanting to grow there. So the Hoffmans decided to “listen to the landscape” and created a water feature for that spot. With a small pathway leading past the new pond to an arbor with a bench, the frog-filled addition has become a favorite lingering spot for guests at the B&B.

Mark is deeply involved with the Center for Sustainable Community, which annually hosts permaculture workshops taught by the Hoffmans and other professionals. For more information on the Greenhouse Bed and Breakfast, visit <http://www.greenhousebed.com/>. 🌱



Bill Wilson introduces Mark Hoffman before touring the gardens that surround the Greenhouse B & B.