

The following extract is from *Introduction to Permaculture* (Mollison 1991:30).

## ■ EVERYTHING WORKS BOTH WAYS

Every resource is either an advantage or a disadvantage, depending on the use made of it. A persistent wind coming off the sea is a disadvantage for growing crops, but we can turn it into an advantage by building a wind-generator and placing our garden within shelterbelts or in a greenhouse.

Disadvantages can be viewed as “problems” and we can take an energy-expensive approach to “get rid of the problem”, or we can think of everything as being a positive resource: it is up to us to work out just *how* we can make use of it. “Problems” can be intractable weeds (e.g. lantana in the tropics), huge boulders lying on the perfect house site, and animals eating garden and orchard produce. How can we turn these into useful components of our system? Lantana is an excellent soil builder; it can be shaded out with a vigorous vine such as choko (chayote), or slashed and used as rough mulch around pioneer trees (which will eventually shade out the lantana if planted densely). Boulders on the perfect house site can be incorporated into the house itself, for beauty and as a heat storage system. Animals can be trapped and eaten; black-bird pie was a standard favourite in England with good reason; possum skins are warm; and venison is undoubtedly a better protein than beef.



“It is only how we see things that make them advantageous or not (if a wind blows cold, let us use both its strength and its coolness to advantage). A corollary of this principle is that everything is a positive resource; it is just up to us to work out *how* we may use it as such.” (Mollison, 1988:35)

**The problem is the solution;  
Everything works both ways.**

## 16. Positivity Principle



WEEDS

EXAMPLES

HEAT PUMP

EXERCISE

HOLMGREN

### H1. Observe and Interact

“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder”

By taking the time to engage with nature we can design solutions that suit our particular situation.

Think of one current waste product in your household that could be used as a resource

Think of a ‘problem’ in your own life that could be turned into a positive

Within traditional agricultural systems weeds are considered a problem to get rid of. In permaculture weeds are a resource (i.e. the problem is the solution). A major ‘weed problem’ in the Townsville / Thuringowa region is Chinese Apple (*Ziziphus mauritiana*). This would not be a problem if you want to raise goats, but would rather be a hardy self-reliant species suitable for browsing.

Weeds can be an indicator of nutrient deficiencies in the soil. For example bracken grows in acidic soils low in fertility.

Weeds are a useful resource when accelerating succession and evolution (see **Principle of Accelerated Succession**). Fast growing weeds can be slashed and used as mulch or composted to increase soil fertility and smother new weeds.

**A heat pump works both ways...** A heat pump for heating water works like a refrigerator in reverse. Warm air enters, the heat is transferred to the water, and then cold air is expelled. In Japan heat pumps are available where the cold air is used for air conditioning. In contrast, in Australia this cold air is usually vented outside and wasted.

