

Earthsong / Eco-Neighbourhood

Earthsong is an innovative urban cohousing development in west Auckland and a model of socially and environmentally sustainable urban living



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Earthsong was founded on a deep commitment to address both the isolation and the high resource use arising from conventional settlement patterns, by building a neighbourhood that is more socially and environmentally sustainable. By balancing the need for individual privacy and autonomy with cooperation and commitment to community, and by applying the principles of green architecture and services on a neighbourhood scale, Earthsong demonstrates a multi-layered approach to creating a healthier and more sustainable living environment. Earthsong is founded on the two equal and complementary systems of cohousing and permaculture. Cohousing is concerned with the relationships of people with each other through building design and organisational structures, permaculture could be described as the relationships of people with the natural world of land, climate, plants and animals. Permaculture (permanent agriculture) is the conscious design and maintenance of agriculturally productive ecosystems that have the diversity, stability, and resilience of natural ecosystems. The concept was developed by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren in Australia. It has subsequently flourished throughout the world as a powerful worldview and system for applying human intelligence and ingenuity to work with the natural order - another win-win strategy. It has evolved to encompass strategies not only for agriculture but for a more permanent, i.e. evolving but sustainable, culture. While much of standard agriculture can be seen as a linear system, beginning with resource input and ending with productivity and waste output, Permaculture aims to create a closed loop where the needs of one element are met by a surplus in another, where waste from one aspect becomes a resource in another. Permaculture Design at Earthsong Permaculture principles are applied at Earthsong in many ways, from the site design and water systems to the productive and edible landscaping, native bush and orchard areas. Buildings are sited to work in with the natural contours of the land and the direction of the sun for passive solar design. The overland stormwater system follows the natural slope of the site to create flourishing water gardens and absorb the rainwater into the soil. Areas of lawn are less common than productive gardens at Earthsong. Gardens flourish all over the site, from the large common vegetable gardens and orchard to individual gardens around the houses, and small areas tucked beside the path or around buildings. Edible plants co-exist with natives and ornamentals, giving a vibrant eclectic flourishing mix enjoyed by people, birds and beneficial insects alike. Grape vines shade houses from hot summer sun while producing sweet grapes. Even the overland stormwater channels are productive, with watercress, puha, banana palms, and berries. No organic waste needs to leave the site but is highly sought after to nourish the many gardens. At Earthsong we use a variety of methods to turn food scraps and weeds into rich fertile compost. Some households have their own smaller compost bins for domestic use. Many residents use the "Bokashi Zing" system of anaerobic fermentation using EM (Effective Microorganisms) for food scraps. Others have worm farms to handle the cooked and/or mushy food waste. Large windrow compost heaps on spare land on the front of site are useful for breaking down larger material.

