

Goals Articulation

The following is a distillation of the goals articulation process as described by Dave Jacke and Eric Tonesmier in **Edible Forest Gardens volume 2**.

In order to develop designs that best meet the needs of the individual (or client) it is essential to clearly articulate one's short and long-term design goals. We obviously cannot begin our design work without a direction in which to steer things - if we do, chance rather than foresight, takes hold of the reins. Goals help us integrate the various elements that will serve our needs, and they also help guide our decision-making. They speed up the process of design and implementation, help ensure details are thoroughly researched, help to re-orient us when suffering from 'designer's block', prevent wasted effort and sharpen our focus in observing our site.

So where to begin? Well, perhaps the most appropriate place is with some good questions...

What crops should you grow? What are their soil, light and moisture requirements? What is your water source? How will you earn a living? How will you heat your house? Where does 'it' come from? How much would you like to work? etc. These are all examples of clear guiding questions that can help us better begin the goals articulation process.

'Articulation'

So what does 'articulation' mean? Both 'to utter distinctly' and 'to form or fit into a systematic whole' are appropriate definitions. With good goals articulation, our results will clearly express our core values, lead us to usable design criteria, and help form those criteria into an integrated whole. Thus, note that we are '**articulating**' our goals, not '**setting**' goals - the latter implies that objectives are imposed on the individual, whereas 'articulation' demands that the individual searches for their own truth and vision.

'Get it down, then get it good'

When beginning to articulate goals, the first rule is to 'get it down, then get it good.' Just grab a sheet of paper and begin making a list of your relevant ideas. Afterwards, take time to revise your thoughts and organize them coherently. From here, we can begin to identify the problems we seek to solve, the intentions we wish to fulfill and the questions we must ask to get there.

It is important that we develop a clear idea of our perceived problem, question or intention (all synonymous in this context). This will help define the possible solutions, answers or manifestations available to us. Embedded cultural conditioning often limits the questions we ask and our sense of available possibilities. Don't limit goals to only those you believe are possible or familiar.

Free Goals from Form

As much as possible, consider your goals in an abstract sense - as something separate from what you want from the site. Look past the **things** you want and **ask what it is that they do for you**. For example, is it really a peach tree that you want, or is it a bountiful supply of fresh fruit in the summer? Go on to ask yourself why you want these things - often we subconsciously limit our thinking. **Focus on functions and purposes** - free your goals from form. This will undoubtedly work to open up new creative possibilities.

Write them down

This is the best way to start the goals articulation process. It helps you evaluate their reality, coherence and truth. It's also easier to revise and revisit your thoughts on paper than in your head. Writing goals down becomes even more important when there is more than one decision maker involved.

Present-Tense, Active-Voice

How you write your goals is nearly as important as whether or not you do it. State your goals in present-tense, active-voice as **desired conditions**. For example, compare, 'One goal is to develop a homestead that enables me to earn a living from products I grow' to 'I sustain myself financially with products I produce on my property.' Notice how in the latter, the present-tense form carries more weight and makes the goal feel more real, as if it has already been achieved. The use of the present-tense enables us to better envision and describe our intentions. Try answering the question, "**What is your desired condition?**"

The use of the active-voice necessitates **brevity, accuracy and forcefulness**. This literary approach creates statements that are forceful, concise and honest. Hence, once you've 'gotten 'em down', revise the statements into the active, present-tense desired conditions to 'get 'em good'.

Keep Your Goals Statement Close By

Your goals will evolve throughout your design process - you'll discover new ideas, take on new information and your analysis and assessment may indicate previously unknown possibilities or limits. Keeping your goals statement handy as you design makes it easier for you to refer to it and modify your work as you go.

Goals Articulation Strategies

Effective goals articulation results in a written statement that clearly defines that which you want to achieve, at an appropriate level of detail, stated as current desired conditions. Here, we'll explain two primary goals articulation processes, one fairly simple, the other more detailed and complex.

Basic Goals Articulation

Using this process, begin by writing your '**goals articulation summary statement**'. To do this, think about your goals as separate from the landscape. Describe your purposes, needs, wants, etc. In a list of bullet points, summarize your essential goals including - desired foods and other useful products, other essential needs the landscape should fulfill, other uses of the site, how the site relates to the larger ecosystem and neighborhood (can it be expanded?), maintenance and establishment efforts and approximate budget, etc. Which of these are the issues that float to the top?

After answering these questions, write a brief statement (3 sentences or less) that describes your overarching goals. You'll know you're on the right track when you feel the statement resonate within. If you already have clear, straightforward intentions and goals and you're satisfied with this summary, you're finished. But do take time to revise it at least once, remembering to modify it as present-tense, active-voice bullet points.

Robust Goals Articulation

This process is more involved and is centered on thorough brainstorming and outlining. It will take more time, effort and self-inquiry but will help you articulate goals to the greatest degree. To begin, brainstorm your goals, needs, issues, problems and desired values, qualities, functions, things and design criteria. Then work to organize them into a coherent outline so they relate to each other in a functional way. This should result in a document in which the reasons for every design detail and the means of achieving them are clearly expressed.

One approach is to write the brainstormed ideas onto notecards or sticky notes and rearranging them into an outline. The **most vague ideas represent overarching values or desired qualities** - these lie at the core of that which we want to create. **Moderately specific goals in turn serve these values** by helping create them. Think of goals as means and values as ends - several goals usually define each overarching value in more concrete terms, but usually are not specific enough in and of themselves to inform a design. Thus, what follows are criteria. **Criteria assist us in creating and knowing we have created what we seek**. They guide us as we analyze, assess and develop our designs. They are the design details.

Use this process to determine your core values. Ask yourself what it is that you are really after - why do you want these things? **Your articulated values should stand alone - they're the things you just want.** Keep them to a maximum of five - any more and they become unwieldy. Once you've fleshed out your outline, begin to look for wholes by using the 'wholeness test'. Basically, this process assumes that by achieving all of the goals that lie underneath a value will fully manifest that value. If a value is not achieved via the wholeness test, ask and answer what other goals are necessary in order to do so.

Other Goal Articulation Tools

Desired Species Niche Analysis

Another goal articulation tool we have available is the desired species niche analysis (DSNA). For garden design, having a clear idea of desired species as well as their ecological niche characteristics is essential to selecting a site, learning about its inherent characteristics and beginning to design the garden. If your goals statement includes desired species, be sure to do one for each. The foundation of a garden's social system lies within the designer's methods of social structure design. After having completed DSNA for several species, look over the group as a whole and summarize what patterns you recognize (ie - what are their preferred habitats, which site conditions predominate as needs?) End by writing down a list of key site-selection criteria and site analysis questions that your work has led you to.

Model Ecosystem Analysis

If you have a certain type of plant community you want to model or create, do a model ecosystem analysis. Here the intention is to uncover habitat design criteria from your chosen 'model ecosystem' by analyzing the architecture, social structure and site conditions of the natural community. This process helps you design criteria that guides site analysis and your own design processes.

First begin by choosing your model ecosystem - find out what naturally grows in your region. Here in Vermont, consult Liz Thompson's Wetland, Woodland, Wildland. Follow by doing a DSNA for each species found in the community/ecosystem. Visit an example of the model community and examine its architecture. Assess the density, patterning and diversity of each vegetative layer, get a sense of soil horizon structure and conclude by summarizing in writing what you've learned about the system's architecture. Go on to prioritize model species list and identify key species you want to use or find useful replacements for and list the site conditions they require. With this information you can go on to select and map your site before doing analysis and assessment.

Conclusion

Without clear goals articulation, a design will not accurately reflect the needs and values of the inhabitants. Time spent investigating one's own needs, vision, wants and dreams will dramatically pay off in the functionality and interaction between 'client' and site. It is only through a union of site realities with design goals that we can create vibrant, healthy, productive landscapes enjoyed by all creatures.