

Observe and Learn

Take a notebook and a pen, go out into the area that you want to assess and write down your thoughts and responses to the following questions:

Find a place in your plot to sit quietly and close your eyes. Make observations:

What kinds of things do you hear?

What kinds of things do you smell?

Are you experiencing pleasant/unpleasant/relaxing/stressful sensations?

Open your eyes:

What are your first impressions?

Is your landscape interesting? If so, what makes it that way?

Do you like your view? What is it that you do/don't like?

Are their different colors, textures, heights, etc?

Site Analysis:

Take a walk around your plot and note the following:

- What resources do you have? Are there resources that you didn't know about or haven't thought about before?
- What kinds of structures have been built? (Sizes, materials, designs, etc)
- What does the soil look like in different parts of your plot?
- Note your directions: Where does the sun rise/set? Where does wind come from?
- What kinds of shadows are your plants and structures creating? Are there areas that are always shady?
- Where are the areas that have full sun?
- Note the climate throughout the seasons: now look for microclimates—where are you finding these? How do they vary from one area to another?
- Do you land that is on a slope? (to what degree?) Has this affected the soil/water/plants/structures/etc?
- Where does your water go? Are there drains? (Follow the flows in your plot)
- Look at access: Do you have pathways/driveways/fences/etc? Where are people/animals walking? Are they using the pathways or making their own? Do vehicles or other things move through your plot? If so, where and how?
- Plant Life: What types of plants already exist? Do you have well established plants like trees and new plants like self-seeding herbs? Do you have useful plants? If so, how are they useful? Are there areas with lots of plants together? Areas with no plants? How do these areas differ (look at microclimate, soil, moisture, etc)
- Animal Life: How are humans using this area? What needs are being met? What needs are not being met? Do you have animals? If so, what needs do they have? What impact are they having on the area? If there are no animals, do you see areas that they might be included?
- Considerations: What is the main use of the area that you are assessing? Do you know the history of the area? What are the long-term goals of the area? Have areas been designated for work? play? agriculture? animals? access? relaxation? Can you see rooms for improvements? Do you have any dreams for making the area a great place to live and/or work? Are there challenges? Solutions?