

# River City Permacult Network

## Permacult Facilitators' Guide

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## Introduction

Thank you for considering facilitating a permacult in Edmonton! In writing these guidelines down, after over 20 permacults in Edmonton, we realized how well the process has worked despite the fact that it has been largely organic and informal. Based on past experience we recognize that there are a lot of basic things we could improve on. This document will help to get you started, but please let us know how it can be improved upon so that we can perfect the blitz! Feel free to mix it up, use your imagination, and make sure that you have fun doing it! We assume that you're fairly familiar with the permacult concept and that you've been on some permacults in the past, if not, this document should help guide you in facilitating a Permacult.

### Your role as facilitator

Your role as facilitator takes place on the day of the permacult. You will be responsible for making sure work gets done according to a permaculture design and well laid out plan; that people are learning as they go, that no one gets hurt, and everyone has a good time.

Often, but not always you're also one of the designers; If not, you need to have a clear understanding of the design and what your role is prior to the day of the blitz in regards to organizing materials, which is usually a job shared between you and the designer/s.

The facilitators' main job is to ensure that the project runs smoothly. This means that your main task is delegation and education. As your workers are volunteers, it is important that they feel that they have gained as much as the host! Education is a key component to your role. Additional duties include facilitating the meet and greet circle, ensuring safe work practices, explaining the design, making site adjustments to the design if problems emerge, announcing breaks and lunch, and thanking everyone at the end of the day.

Our experience from past permablitzes is that the best facilitators are not micromanagers, but rather give people the understanding and a certain amount of freedom to figure things out and problem solve on their own. You'll likely be working with a bunch of strangers, but generally intelligent and interesting individuals. It's amazing how well it all comes together. Allow space for others to bring in new ideas and inform the design as they see opportunities for improvement!

That said, you do need to be good at delegating, and to know that people are there to work, so don't be afraid to give them work to do. There will be times in the day when some clear leadership and direction is needed.

You also need to think about logistics and movement of materials to avoid things like double handling of soil. We recommend thinking about this before the day since things like timing and placement of materials can make a large difference.

## **Welcoming**

Typically the day starts at 8:00 am for the facilitator and 9:00am for the volunteers. We encourage our facilitators to engage someone from the yoga community to lead a half hour stretch from 9:00am to 9:30 am. As people arrive in the morning do your best to introduce yourself and the attendees to each other. Have DIY nametags ready to go, and make sure the host has beverages ready when people arrive. Let people know that you'll be gathering around 10:00 am to explain the design and the outline of the day.

### **Meet and Greet Circle**

At around one hour into the official starting time of the blitz or when most people have arrived, ask people to come together for an introduction. The things to cover are:

- Welcoming
- Names, introductions, and icebreakers
- Design explanation
- Housekeeping
- Health and Safety
- Timetable for the rest of the day
- Explaining the tasks for the day and breaking into groups
- Lunch and Refreshment break times

### **Welcome**

Welcome everyone and give a quick explanation about the permablitz before going into introductions.

### **Introductions**

Ask people to say their name, their neighbourhood, and how many blitzes they've been to. You may also want to ask what the volunteers are hoping to get out of this experience. Let the group know that anyone can run a 10 minute workshop on something of interest throughout the day, provided they check in with the facilitator first so as to avoid timing issues.

Now that everyone is together and settled, we recommend that you play some icebreaker and teambuilding games. In fact, we can't stress enough how beneficial it is when a group laughs together and breaks down the stranger barriers. The positive energy, community building, and work ethic will all increase. And, one of the major outcomes of a Permablitz should be FUN!

If you need help with finding these kinds of activities or leading them, please let us know and we'll hook you up!

## Explaining the design

This is your chance to explain some of the principles of permaculture as they are embodied in the design. This can be really interesting and exciting stuff especially to people hearing it for the first time. You can explain concepts like the value of diversity, multifunction, zones, sectors, relative location, microclimate, and water harvesting details. Make sure you allow time for questions. A large print out of the design is useful, while also referring to places in the actual yard.

## Housekeeping

Mention where the toilets are, water, and any site specific things people need to know.

## Health and safety issues

**Back care** - There should be a demonstration of good back care and some stretching to get things started. We sometimes ask people to do one stretch as they are introducing themselves.

### The basic principles for good back care on a blitz are:

- Not bending as you dig or lift with your back, instead using your legs to lift as much as possible with a relatively straight back. At the end of the day it should be your butt that hurts not your back, which leads to looking good in tight pants, so why wouldn't you do it this way?
- Bending and twisting at the same time is one that you want to **avoid!** This is an especially common thing to do when moving compost from a pile to a wheelbarrow for instance. Instead of rotating your back to move material from one pile to another take a few steps and use your legs. When you do lift, use your legs and engage your abs, which will support your back.
- Using short handled shovels for heavy things like clay or soil, as the greater leverage on long handled implements can cause more problems for you.
- Take breaks and rest your back when necessary. Don't overdo it!

**Warming up before work** - One thing we've done in the past is to ask everyone in the group to show us one stretch, and by the time we've gone around the circle we'll have done some pretty good back stretches. We hope to have some online video resources soon though about some standard warm up stretches. Facilitators should keep an eye on everyone's digging and lifting style throughout the day and help them improve it. When you use the right technique you can work a lot longer! If you see people digging incorrectly you can joke about disqualifying them to encourage them to change.

**Tools** - Tools can of course be dangerous. **We recommend avoiding the use of power tools during a blitz.** However if they are required, set up an exclusion zone for kids, and have someone dedicated to keeping an eye on the area. Practice common sense, and only use these types of tools if you have appropriate footwear, preferably steel toed shoes.

**Site-specific dangers** - Have you or the home owner called Alberta First Call and Shaw to locate lines? Are there trenches, or other site-specific dangers to point out? Make sure you are clear about these dangers before the blitz begins so as to avoid injury, property damage, or death!

## Timetable for the rest of the day

Having a clear plan in place for everyone is essential. Everyone who comes to a blitz wants to learn and work so it is very important to keep people productively busy. Take time to explain the steps involved in achieving the design. What order do things have to happen in? What are the bottlenecks? For example, there might be only two wheelbarrows and lots of soil to move, so they need to be moving all day non-stop. You may want to have a whiteboard or sign to show design steps, bottleneck jobs, workshop times, etc. If you have co-facilitators handling certain aspects of the day, have them explain what needs to be done in their area. Also, let everyone know when lunch is, when we might run some workshops,. Now, Break up into groups and get going!

A typical Permaculture Day runs as follows:

#### **8:00 am**

- Meet with facilitator and get last minute things prepared.

#### **9:00 am**

- Meet people as they arrive, and give them a nametag, a marker and masking tape for their tools.
- Have a registration sheet or book for people to record their contact details for any future Permaculture you may plan for your garden, if there is going to be stage 2.
- Have beverages and snacks ready.

#### **9:30 am**

- Most people have arrived, the facilitator forms a **meet and greet circle**.
- **Yoga** - We love to start our blitzes off with a 30-minute yoga practice to loosen everyone up

#### **10:00am**

Meet and greet circle

As this is a community building activity, making connections is essential. The meet and greet circle is a chance for everyone to introduce themselves, say where they are from, what they hope to learn and if they've attended a previous blitz. This is also a great time to play some icebreaker and team building games and to get everyone laughing! At this time, The designer shows a copy of the design and an explanation of how the design is going to work. A housekeeping, health, and safety talk is vital and should include safety tips including a demonstration of how to dig and lift safely.

#### **10:30am**

- Work begins with small workshops to explain processes of what's going on.
- Tasks are allocated

#### **12:00 pm**

- Lunch

#### **1:00 pm**

- Back to work with workshops throughout the afternoon:

#### **2:30 pm**

- Afternoon refreshment break

#### **5:00 pm**

- Gather in a circle to celebrate what has been achieved and thank people before they start to drift off.
- If there's anything left to do some people might choose to hang around and help.
- We try and encourage people to stay around and have a small party with food, music and dancing!

## **Workshops**

Every blitz should have at least one or two workshops planned. The basic workshops are usually directly related to the tasks of the day such as planting fruit trees, making no-dig gardens, building compost piles etc. These happen directly before we start work on that project and usually last between 5-15 minutes. Secondary workshops can be on anything permaculture or sustainability related. Some examples of secondary workshops are making sourdough bread, solar dehydrator construction, local plant ecology, cob oven building, mason bee box construction, painting garden signs with clay paints, etc. The potential for these workshops are limited only by your creativity!

Depending on how fast people tackle the workloads, you may find there are people standing around with little to do. At other times, rain may be heavy and work stops are a perfect solution to filling in the time. Therefore, it is great to have some workshops on hand and ready to go at a moment's notice for these events. Also, if some people are looking underutilized we can run a workshop for half the people, and when it's over run it again for the other half.

## **Prioritizing**

As the facilitator, you need to be aware of how the day is flowing; Is everything going to get finished or is another blitz in order? Is the order of tasks you set out working well or do some things need to be reorganized? Are there bottlenecks that could be eliminated? Remember to work at keeping everyone happy, productive, and engaged throughout the permablitz. This will keep the volunteers coming back again and again!

## **Thanks and finishing the day off**

Before people drift off individually, it's best to bring people together to have another circle, celebrate what's been achieved, and thank everyone for their effort. You may want to let folks share their favourite part of the day with everyone. This is also a chance to thank the host for the meal and the opportunity to practice permaculture principles on the ground. A group photo would be a great idea too! If there's still work to be done and people are keen to hang around, feel free to keep working. Lastly, because fun and community building are inherent to the permablitz model, we strongly recommend...a party! If the host is willing, having a chance to unwind, dance, and drink some "adult beverages" is a great way to end the day.

## **Closing Remarks**

Thank you again for taking on the task of facilitating a permablitz. Your efforts are helping to make our city more resilient. May your experience facilitating a Permablitz be a great success.

If you have any comments, questions, or feedback about this guide, please let us know so that we may make this organization more effective.

Happy blitzing!