

River City Permablitz Network

Host's Guide

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Introduction

Congratulations!

If you're reading this, it's probably because you're about to host a permablitz. This short manual will help you get prepared so you know what to expect on, before and after the permablitz day when a horde of volunteers helps you turn your yard, school ground, business property, or public space into an edible oasis!

Who can host a blitz?

Permablitzes work on reciprocal trade. Traditionally, we ask that you participate in two permablitzes coordinated by the network before hosting your own however, until we get a critical mass, we will be accepting proposals from anyone who is a member of the Edmonton Permaculture Guild and is willing to host a Permablitz. Following your Permablitz, we ask that you volunteer for at least two upcoming blitzes. Once you are part of the group we'll help organize and promote a blitz for you. Don't worry; you don't need a lot of skills, just a commitment to give it a try.

Permablitz History

The first Permablitz was held in Melbourne in 2006; a collaboration between some permaculture students and a South American community group. As of mid-2011 over 100 permablitzes have been held in and around Melbourne, and many others have been held all over the world. Indeed, the permablitz concept has been adopted by many organizations and informal networks whose intent is to create beautiful, edible landscapes and thus increase community resiliency.

In Melbourne at least, all organizers, facilitators, workers and most designers on the blitzes have been volunteers, there has never been any funding, and the network has remained largely informal and organic. This will be the case for the River City Permablitz Network as well. We believe Permaculture principles and practices should be available to all regardless of financial barriers.

In Edmonton, there have been at least 20 informal blitzes over the last two years with many more in the works each year. Due to the growing interest in local food and sustainable communities we decided it was time to help speed the repair of our city and the world! Thus, the River City Permablitz Network was born.

Your role as a Permablitz host

As a blitz host you are about to receive a big input of labour, design and good energy. Permablitzes are great fun, but do require some preparation. You'll be expected to work with a designer, feed the volunteers, gather materials, and prepare the site. Typically the host does not do too much work during the blitz as you are keeping the volunteers watered and fed, however we do encourage you to get your hands dirty if you have time! You can expect help from the permablitz network with your design, coming up with quantities of materials needed, facilitating the day, and some follow up help if needed. We'll go into more detail below.

Step 1 - Design

About permaculture design

We insist that **every Permablitz must have a permaculture design informing it**. The design can be your own if you have a permaculture design certificate or, you can work with a local permaculture designer to prepare a design for you. Having a good plan is essential so that the blitzers know how to make the design on paper a reality.

So why do we insist you have a permaculture design? We want systems that are going to yield abundant food for your family or organization, create habitat, clean the water, build topsoil, create community and educate others how to do the same. We do not want to install ornamental gardens or lawns. A permaculture designer knows how to create designs that meet all the above criteria as well as tailoring the design to your budget, skill levels, time and to the constraints and creative possibilities of your space.

About Permaculture: Permaculture (short for permanent culture or permanent agriculture) is a design system that helps us work with nature, rather than against it, while providing for our needs. It helps us obtain a yield while repairing and enhancing damaged environments -- like cities for example. A lot of it comes down to employing some conscious design, and some common sense to help us avoid common pitfalls, while broadening our ideas of what is possible. See www.permacultureprinciples.com for a list of principles that underpin permaculture design strategies.

The Permaculture ethic is **Care of Earth, Care of People, and Return of Surplus**. All permaculture design is informed by this ethic.

Finding a designer

Once you decide you want a blitz of your own (and you're willing to participate in at least two others), contact us and we can help connect you to a permaculture designer. Check www.edmontonpermacultureguild.ca for an updated list of designers with contact information. Some of the designers are just getting started and will offer their services for free or at reduced cost while others are experienced and therefore worth the fees charged. Volunteer designers offer their services because they want experience, but of course no one is under obligation to offer their skills for free.

We do not regulate designers or their designs. The role of the permablitz network is to facilitate connection and communication so our community can become more resilient.

We don't discriminate against wealthier people, but we often feel better about performing volunteer designs for people who couldn't have otherwise afforded it. If you can afford it we strongly recommend you hire an experienced Permaculture designer. This supports the local economy and strengthens the ability of our community members to practice right livelihood. We maintain a list of professional designers who are willing to be contributors to the permablitz network.

The design process

What to expect

The designer can help you locate the various elements of your system such as veggie beds, fruit trees, micro livestock, sheds, greenhouses, pergolas, paths, water-tanks, composting areas, seating areas, lawn and simple water recycling systems. Considerations as to their placement include ease of access, shade and shelter (microclimates), services to the house such as providing summer shade and winter sun, soil types, aesthetics, privacy, and so on. Designers also try to place elements so that they complement each other which in turn, minimizes your work. One of the great permaculture sayings is "work is a failure in design."

At the end of the design process you should have a sketch of your property that has been rendered to scale, a legend of design elements, planting list, some explanatory notes and implementation guidelines.

What to provide

The designers will benefit from any house plans you have. Real property reports (RPRs) are a great resource that can streamline the design process. The designer will likely ask you to fill out a questionnaire that details your households' wants, skills, resources, time availabilities, etc. It is good to go over this questionnaire during the site visit as it helps the designer to conceptualize the design while they are observing your property.

Step 2 - Preparing for the day

Permablitz Facilitator

Generally, the permaculture designer will facilitate the Permablitz. As the facilitator has a lot of work to do, it is not uncommon for the facilitator to charge an hourly wage while directing the project. Although it may be tempting to forgo this cost, the benefit of having a facilitator cannot be underestimated. They can make the difference between a positive, productive experience and a bloody headache. The River City Permablitz network can help you find a facilitator if need be.

Set a date

Work with the facilitator(s) to set a date for the permablitz, and let us know so we can add it to our online calendar. Generally you'll want to give yourself a few weeks to prepare and time to promote the event. It's not usually a major consideration if there are other blitzes on the same day, but we

would recommend finding a date that does not have other blitzes scheduled. Most blitzes are scheduled on weekends, but if you are feeling adventurous (or you have a small project) try hosting one on a weekday!

Gathering materials

The designer's report should include a list of materials such as length of pipes, cubic meters of mulch, height of newspaper piles etc. Some materials such as cardboard and horse manure can often be sourced for free. If you have a list of materials that you need that you would like to crowd source, post a list of your needs on both the River City Permablitz Network and Edmonton Permaculture Facebook page.

Promoting your blitz

We feel that the successful promotion of your blitz requires a multipronged approach. We maintain a mailing list that we will happily use to inform keen volunteers about your blitz as well as a Facebook group. We also have connections with other like-minded organizations that will most likely be willing to spread the good word. We strongly encourage you to engage neighbours, friends, family and the local community! Remember we are not just ripping up a lawn, we are growing food security, working towards resilient communities by strengthening those connections all while making new friends and connections.

Bookings and numbers

Most blitzes, particularly in easily accessible locations, fill up quickly. The Edmonton Permaculture Guild website will advertise your blitz and allow people to sign up for your project. This way you can track volunteer numbers so that you can anticipate mouths to feed. Too much energy in any system creates chaos and disorder so we recommend limiting the number of people attending your blitz to 15 – 20 people.

The number of people you can handle depends on:

- size of the property
- the amount of work to be done
- whether there are additional facilitators/supporters who can run workshops through out the day to soak up all the spare energy and make sure people have a good time.

A Permablitz is a **FREE** Event for the volunteers.

Step 3 - The day of the blitz

Setting a game-plan for the day

Sometimes several projects are independent, other times one must be completed before others can proceed causing a bottleneck. You should talk to the designers and facilitators prior to blitz day to work through your game plan. Prioritize what aspect of your design you want to be completed first. A bit of forethought can help things go smoothly.

A typical Permablitz 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 permablitz 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!

Health and safety

Prior to the Permablitz, your role is to deal with any obvious safety issues. Don't plan to fell any trees or large branches on the day, or other potentially dangerous activities. As well, the host is responsible for locating underground lines and hazards well in advance of the blitz. Contacting a company such as <http://www.1calllocators.com/> is a good idea.

It's the facilitator's role on the day to draw attention to any dangerous tools, like mattocks or power tools. They should also discuss proper back care, and highlight any safety issues specific to the site.

Food and drinks

It is the host's responsibility to provide a nice selection of nourishing food for the volunteers. A light breakfast such as fruit, yogurt, muffins, coffee/tea, and water are excellent choices. Lunch should

provide a vegetarian selection. It is recommended that you ask those who have signed up for your blitz if they have any special dietary requirements. We've had anything from BBQs to an award-winning chef catering lunch; food is the best way to win a permie's heart! It is also essential to have beverages available throughout the day to keep people hydrated!

Workshops

Every permablitz has workshops, and the designers / facilitators as well as other participants can run them. They are often humble, running anywhere from 3 to 30 minutes. They can be related to gardening, cooking, craft, tools, culture or other aspects of sustainable living. Workshop possibilities are only limited by your imagination!

After the blitz

If we're lucky with the weather, and we planned well, we might have finished everything we set out to do. If not you may be left with some implementation work left to do. Either way you've now got some maintenance work ahead of you -- lovely, relaxing gardening for the most part, and you've got healthy, delicious food to look forward to. If you're a beginner gardener, there's a lot to learn, but you can achieve a lot just by giving it a try. There are lots of great sources of help within our permaculture community if you run into problems.

Blog your Blitz

The last thing we ask of you is that you share the story of your blitz on our website. This is part of the reciprocity process. It also helps spread the word and get people inspired and excited! We love to get time-lapse slide shows of the blitz as well as a story about how the whole process unfolded from design to implementation. If you're not particularly computer savvy, ask a friend or family member for some assistance. If you don't know someone who can assist you, let us know and we'll help you out. We're not asking for a novel so please don't be daunted by this.

Closing Remarks

Thank you for choosing to host a permablitz. Your efforts are helping to make our city more livable, vibrant, and tasty now and for generations to come. We wish you a positive Permablitz experience. Please share with us your feedback regarding the role The Edmonton Permaculture Guild and the River City Permablitz Network played in this process. We'd love to hear your comments, questions, and constructive criticism so that we may make this organization more resilient and effective. We wish you happy blitzing!

Resources to help you with your Permablitz

Membership has its rewards. The Edmonton Permaculture Guild has partnered with a number of organizations to provide a yield to our members. Check out the list of partners and organizations working with the Edmonton Permaculture Guild to provide value added to our members.

- Greenhouse and Nursery Discounts
- Workshop Discounts
- Member benefits with affiliated Associations etc.

Check out what is happening in the community via social media such as the Facebook page for Edmonton Permaculture; Edmonton Needs & Yields; River City Permacult Network.

- Look for businesses who give away pallets and large sheets of cardboard
- Most coffee shops will give you the spent coffee grounds – great for adding nitrogen into your beds (not too much though)
- Vermicompost and table scraps can be added to your garden beds
- Bags of leaves, grass clippings, wood chips for mulch, twigs and rotting logs for hugelkultur etc.

Resources for Design Implementation

This is just a small list of sources for permaculture supplies in our city. It is by no means exhaustive!

<http://www.1callocators.com/> -contact to locate underground lines and hazards

<http://www.canar.ca/>- landscaping supplies including good quality topsoil and compost

<http://egs.ca/>- tons of resources to lighten your footprint including rain barrels, red wiggler worms, seeds, etc.

<http://www.homereusables.com/dev/>- a source for recycled home building materials

<http://www.freecycle.org/> - Free stuff

<http://edmonton.craigslist.ca/> - Free and cheap stuff

<http://edmonton.kijiji.ca/> - Free and cheap stuff

General Permaculture Information Resources

www.edmontonpermacultureguild.ca - Edmonton Permaculture community group

<http://www.permaculturecalgary.org/> - Calgary Permaculture community group

<http://www.permaculturenews.org/>- The Permaculture Research Institute of Australia

<http://permacultureprinciples.com/>- 12 eloquently explained permaculture principles

<http://www.permaculture.co.uk/>- Permaculture Magazine

<http://www.permacultureactivist.net/>- Permaculture Activist Magazine