



# MELBOURNE PERMABLITZ

## Host 's Guide



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## **Intro**

If you're reading this, it's probably because you're about to host your very own permablitz. Congratulations! This guide will help get you prepared and know what to expect on, before and after the day, as a horde of volunteers help turn your yard into an edible oasis!

### ***Who can host a blitz?***

Generally we ask that you come along to three permablitzes in order for us to help organise and promote a blitz for you. You don't need to be a gardening guru with lots of prior knowledge and skills, just a willingness to have a go.

By attending permablitzes, you:

- a) get an idea of what to expect on the day
- b) learn useful and relevant skills
- c) demonstrate the drive needed to maintain your own garden
- d) contribute to the network first (thanks for that!)

### ***About Permablitz Melbourne***

The first permablitz was held in Melbourne in 2006 and was a collaboration between some permaculture students and a South American community group. As of Oct 2012, over 140 permablitzes have been held in and around Melbourne, and the concept has spread to many cities and towns around Australia and the world. The permablitz model has also been adopted by many organisations and informal networks.

In Melbourne, all organisers, facilitators, workers and most of the designers on the blitzes have been volunteers—there has never been any funding and the network has remained largely informal and organic.

A website ([www.permablitz.net](http://www.permablitz.net)) and mailing list are maintained in Melbourne by volunteers to help co-ordinate the network. Region-based permaculture groups such as Permaculture Out West (POW) have begun co-ordinating permablitzes in their areas within Melbourne, as have some local Transition groups ([www.transitiontowns.org](http://www.transitiontowns.org)).

### ***Your roles***

As a blitz host, you're about to receive a big input of labour, design and energy. Permablitzes are great fun, but do require some work getting ready for. You'll be expected to work with a designer, organise materials, do some prep work and most importantly, feed the troops. In fact you may not be doing much work at all in the garden on the day of the blitz, as hosts often find themselves in the kitchen instead.

The permablitz network will help you with your design, come up with the quantities of materials needed, facilitate the day and provide some follow up help if needed.

## **Step 1. Design**

### ***About permaculture design***

Every permablitz must incorporate permaculture design, therefore someone who's completed a Permaculture Design Certificate (PDC) needs to work with you to draft up a

design for your garden.

We want systems which are appropriate for your budget, skill levels and time, and work with the constraints and creative possibilities of your space. We want it to work for you, your space and to produce as much as it can!

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

### ***Finding a designer***

Once you've been to a few blitzes and have decided that you want to host your own, we can help connect you to a permaculture designer.

The Melbourne permablitz network has a mailing list of around 200 people who have completed a PDC (as of Oct 2012). If you're in need of a volunteer designer, we can forward your description of your property and dreams for it to those on the list to see if someone can help. We'll try to set you up with one or more designers. The designers volunteer their time to gain experience, but of course are under no obligation.

Your chance of getting a free design seems to increase if you:

- a) sound nice :-)
- b) live in an easily accessible location
- c) have an interesting (but not overwhelmingly complicated) project

Whilst we don't discriminate against wealthier people, our preference is to perform volunteer designs for people who couldn't otherwise afford it. If you can afford it you might consider a professional design—we maintain a list of professional designers who have been major contributors to the permablitz network. A professional permaculture design can cost anywhere between \$400 and \$3000, depending on the level of detail. For most blitzes, something towards the lower end of the scale would suffice, although you'll need to find out whether the designer is willing to put volunteer time into also helping you prepare or facilitate the blitz if it's at the lower end.

See [www.permablitz.net/resources/permaculture-design-services](http://www.permablitz.net/resources/permaculture-design-services) for our contacts.

### ***The design process***

#### **What to expect**

The design helps you locate the various elements of your system: e.g. veggie beds, fruit trees, chooks, sheds, pergolas, paths, water-tanks, composting areas, seating spaces, lawn, greenhouse, simple grey water systems and so on, in a way that makes the best use of the space. 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, etc. We also try to place elements in such a way so that they compliment each other (chickens running under fruit trees is a great example) and minimise your work.

At the end of the design process you should have a to-scale sketch, explanatory notes and brief implementation guidelines. In order to achieve this the designer(s) usually need a minimum of 3-4 hours consulting with you and developing the design on-site. Better put the kettle on...

#### **What to provide**

The designers will benefit from any house plans you have. They will want to know about your household's wants, skills, time, likes and dislikes, and they will spend some time observing your backyard and seeing what they can make fit.

It's always best to get at least the major elements of the design set on the day of the designers' visit, therefore if there are people in your household who might have different opinions than you, they should also be present.

#### **Timelines**

It's okay to ask the design team for a rough timeline on when they expect to complete the design. Experienced designers may complete the design on the day, but others may take up to 3 months from the initial consultation, as they'll be researching systems and reviewing their ideas with you before finalising the design. Occasionally the process may take longer than expected, for example if designers encounter difficulties such as a tricky site or have pressing personal commitments. Please be patient, but do let the permablitz collective know if the team is having difficulty completing the design within their proposed timeframe so that we can support them where possible.

## **Step 2. Preparing for the day**

### ***Finding a facilitator***

Generally you won't be expected to facilitate the blitz yourself (although some hosts do). There may be one or more facilitators—usually one of the designers or someone else from within the permablitz network. If one of the designers can't do it, email us ([permablitz@gmail.com](mailto:permablitz@gmail.com)) and we'll try to fill the role, as we have a list of experienced facilitators. If you have friends taking on certain parts of the project, they may be able to help co-ordinate on the day. For a particularly complex blitz, up to five or more facilitators and team leaders may be needed, whereas for a very simple blitz you may only need one facilitator. The *Permablitz Melbourne Facilitators' Guide* can be found on our website.

### ***Set a date***

Work with the facilitator(s) to set a date for the permablitz, then let us know so that we can add it to the permablitz calendar online and our Facebook page. Generally you'll want to give yourself at least a couple of weeks to prepare and promote the event. Nearly all of our blitzes have been held on weekends, but a few have been on weekdays. Unless you're in an out of the way place, don't worry if there's other blitzes on the same day, as there seems to be no shortage of people wanting to come along to help out. Please tell us (via an e-mail to [permablitz@gmail.com](mailto:permablitz@gmail.com)) when your blitz is booked out so that we can add that to our event calendar and avoid frustrations for you and potential Blitzers.

## ***Gathering materials***

The designer's report should include a list of materials such as: length of pipes, cubic metres of mulch, height of newspaper piles, etc. Some materials such as cardboard, seedlings and horse manure can often be sourced for free. There may be materials someone has but doesn't want—you can make a wish-list prior to the blitz and we'll post it on the online calendar's event description to see if anyone can provide what you're after.

Wherever possible the materials used during a permablitz should be non-toxic, which means finding alternatives to herbicides and CCA treated pine. Luckily the nature of a permablitz ensures that you have plenty of labour to easily accomplish tasks such as weeding on a large scale. Timber that is naturally durable, such as cypress, is now widely available (see the Resources section of this guide for more details).

### **Discounts:**

Print out your permablitz design and take it into either Ceres Permaculture & Bushfoods Nursery or Bulleen Art and Garden (BAAG), both of whom have generously offered discounts on plants for permablitzes.

- Ceres Nursery, corner of Roberts and Stewart Streets, Brunswick East. Open seven days a week from 9am until 5pm.  
Ph: 03 9389 0111. Email: [nursery@ceres.org.au](mailto:nursery@ceres.org.au). Web: [www.ceres.org.au/nursery/nursery.html](http://www.ceres.org.au/nursery/nursery.html)  
They offer 10% off all plants for the day of your permablitz.
- Bulleen Art and Garden, 6 Manningham Road West, Bulleen. Open Monday – Wednesday: 9am – 5pm and Thursday – Sunday: 9am – 5:30pm.  
Ph: 03 8850 3030 Web: [www.baag.com.au](http://www.baag.com.au)  
They offer a 15% discount on plants and 7.5% off most materials for a permablitz.

Their excellent staff can help you find the right plant for the design, so it's a good idea to have it with you anyway. But in order to get the discount you must bring in a copy of your design, which should be clearly marked as a permablitz design. Bring in this guide so that casual staff know of the arrangement. Chat to Laurel at Ceres or Paul at BAAG if you need.

## ***Promoting your blitz***

We'll promote your blitz on our website and mailing list, which goes out to over 4000 people (as of Aug 2014), so we'll need a short blurb from yourself or your designer/facilitator. We like to have at least a month's notice to allow us time to get the word out. You can post a blurb to the website calendar yourself at <http://www.permablitz.net/calendar/add-an-event> or just send us an email at [permablitz@gmail.com](mailto:permablitz@gmail.com).

If you don't want your permablitz featured please let us know.

You may wish to invite neighbours or other members of the local community to your blitz. Good ways of letting people know about the blitz is to put up notices in local milkbars, in local newspapers, your workplace's newsletter, etc.



## ***Bookings and numbers***

Most blitzes, particularly those in the inner city, quickly fill up. We *highly* recommend that you take RSVPs in order to limit numbers and work out catering requirements.

The number of people you can handle depends on:

- 1) size of the block
- 2) amount of work to do
- 3) whether there are extra facilitators who can run workshops throughout the day to keep everyone engaged

Typically permablitzes are capped in the ballpark of 12-50 attendees. We've had great blitzes with even higher numbers – these ones ran back-to-back workshops throughout the day so that only half the people were working at any one time.

## ***Setting a game-plan for the day***

Sometimes several projects are independent, and other times one must be completed before others can proceed, which can cause a bottleneck. You should talk to the designers and facilitators before the day to consider these issues. Prioritise what aspect of your design you want to be completed first. Some jobs (like moving huge piles of compost or mulch) may need a concerted day-long effort if they are to be finished. A bit of forethought can help things run smoothly on the day.

It's good to find a balance between having every tiny detail under control and allowing for a small amount of chaos, as this allows people to problem solve. Work with the facilitator in order to come up with a sensible game-plan, but be flexible enough to let things take on a life of their own too.

A typical plan of the day looks something like this:

### *Before 9am*

Meet with the facilitator and do last minute preparations.

### *10am*

Greet people as they arrive, give them masking tape and a texta to make name tags for themselves and their tools.

Have cups of tea ready!

Possibly have a registration sheet for people to record their contact details if you'll be holding a future blitz (if there's going to be a stage 2).

The facilitator should have some safe, easy-to-explain but time-consuming tasks (such as weeding) for early arrivals to get into while waiting for the blitz to officially begin.

### *11am*

By now most people have arrived. The facilitator forms a meet and greet circle, asking everyone to say their name, where they are from, what they hope to learn (briefly) and if they've been to a blitz before.

The designer holds up a copy of the design and explains it, the permaculture aspects behind it and reasons why it has been designed this way.

Run down of housekeeping and health & safety tips (usually including a demonstration of how to correctly dig and move as to not hurt your back).

Morning tea may be provided.

*11:30am*

Back to work, this time with more purpose. People may be split into groups, depending on what they want to learn. There may be small workshops happening which explain the processes of what's going on.

*1pm*

Lunch!

*1:45pm*

Back to work...

*Throughout the afternoon:*

Workshops

*4pm*

Gather in a circle to celebrate what has been achieved and thank everyone before they start to drift off.

If there's anything left to do, some people might choose to hang around and help.

Music, dancing? People may feel sweaty, dirty and ready to go home, but sometimes the blitzes turn into small parties!

## ***Health and Safety***

Before the day, your role is to remove any obvious dangers on your block, or do any prep work that would be dangerous to do on the day. For instance it's wise not to fell any trees or large branches on the day, so these should happen before.

Powertools with a blade (circular saws, angle grinders, chainsaws, etc) pose a particularly high risk and we recommend that:

1. Power tools shouldn't be used on a blitz.

Remember that during a blitz there will be lots of people and possibly kids on the site. Besides the obvious dangers, cables from power tools are a tripping hazard and the noise of power tools is at best irritating, and at worst, damaging without ear protection. Please try to complete any jobs requiring these tools before the day of the blitz.

2. Blitzes should use hand tools where possible.



Original image by [nstueve](#)



Yes it takes a little longer and requires more elbow grease, but there are plenty of helping hands during a blitz and using hand tools is a much safer alternative. These tools allow more people to participate and also allow us to demonstrate the permaculture principle of 'small and slow solutions'!

3. If the use of dangerous power tools during the blitz absolutely can't be avoided, the following precautions must be taken:
  - Create a fenced-off exclusion zone to keep people well away from the area.
  - Nominate someone as a spotter for this area to stop anyone from accidentally wandering into the quarantine zone and putting themselves or the tool user at risk.
  - Nominate someone to take primary responsibility for these tools, which includes making sure they are not left unattended during breaks.
  - Ensure that only properly trained and competent people use these tools and at their own risk.

It's the facilitator's role on the day to draw attention to any dangerous tools, such as power tools or mattocks. They should also discuss proper back care and highlight any safety issues specific to the site. The Permablitz Melbourne Facilitators' Guide has more resources and tips for the facilitators about this.

You should have a fully equipped first aid kit. Generally in a group of 10 or more people, someone will have done first aid training, so the facilitator should ask these people to identify themselves. Many people on our facilitators list have first aid training too. To our knowledge no serious injury has happened on a permablitz, but we should always be prepared. [Aug 2012 update: someone got a badly infected hand and had to be treated in hospital several days after a permablitz after a puncture wound from a spikey plant was not cleaned.]



### ***Food and drinks***

Early blitzes were BYO food and drink, but now this is provided by the hosts. You might ask those who have booked if they have any special dietary requirements, but it's always best to have some vegetarian food and gluten free options available. We've had everything from classic Aussie BBQs to a Sri Lankan feast cooked by an award winning chef! Don't feel pressured though to do anything too fancy, as a hard working crowd is always appreciative, no matter what the spread is. Have cups of tea available for when people arrive and also in the afternoon. If you don't want to be chained to the oven or kettle for the day, it's worth asking a friend to help you out.

### ***Other bits and pieces to have ready***

- **Design plan** - have at least one large copy of the design printed out and stuck up outside as a reference. For complex designs you may want to display more of these.
- **Name tags** – to go on people and tools. Masking tape and textas will suffice.
- **Sunscreen** – have this available regardless of the weather.

## **Workshops**

Every permablitz has workshops, which are run by the designer/facilitators and sometimes other participants. They can run from 3 minutes to an hour, and can be related not only to gardening, but cooking, craft, tools, culture or other aspects of sustainable living. Is there a way you can bring some personal flavour to your blitz with workshops created by your friends or family? There's more information on workshops in the Facilitators' Guide.

## **Step 3: The Day Itself**

If you've considered all of these things in advance, you're destined for a fun filled day!

After the blitz

If the weather behaves and the blitz has been planned well, you may be all done by the end of the day. If not, you may be left with some more implementation work to do. Either way, you'll have maintenance work ahead of you in order to reap the benefits of the healthy, delicious food your garden can provide. If you're a novice gardener, there's lots to learn, but you can achieve a lot just by having a go. Most importantly, enjoy yourself! There are lots of fantastic sources that can help if you have any problems or queries (see below).

Please let us know all about your experiences and if there's anything you'd like to add to this document. We have a survey which we'll email to you after your blitz.

Please stay in touch and send us your updates and photos ([permablitz@gmail.com](mailto:permablitz@gmail.com)); we'd really appreciate it! :-)

## **Community support**

### **Landshare**

Your designers shouldn't have thrown you too far into the deep end, but in case you have bitten off more than you can chew, [www.landshareaustralia.com.au](http://www.landshareaustralia.com.au) can help you find people that will help you garden in return for produce. On the flip side, you may have found that you want more land to grow more food, in which case you might help someone else!

### **Streetbank**

Streetbank is all about sharing resources within your neighbourhood and helps you to meet and make friends with people in your local area. All sorts of things can be shared, such as sewing machines, vegetables, wheelbarrows, tools, cars and books. Skills can be shared too: gardening help, bike fixing, language skills, childminding, how to make wine or dance the tango. There may be offers of gardening help as well: [www.streetbank.com](http://www.streetbank.com)

### **Local Permaculture Groups**

There may be a local permaculture group in your area. Some are more active than others and many meet face to face to run workshops and meetings, and maintain websites and email lists. These networks can be great places to share experiences, bulk buy items such as straw or plants, share seeds and cuttings, etc. Some of these groups are involved in facilitating permablitzes.

Most Victorian groups can be found here:  
[permaculturemelbourne.org.au/local-groups/](http://permaculturemelbourne.org.au/local-groups/)

## **Other resources**

### **Online**

[www.sgaonline.org.au](http://www.sgaonline.org.au) – great newsletters, fact sheets and garden groups (PODs) from Sustainable Gardening Australia.

[www.aussieslivingsimply.com.au](http://www.aussieslivingsimply.com.au) – lots of info and help in these great forums.

[www.veryediblegardens.com](http://www.veryediblegardens.com) – fact sheets, courses, our recommended books and consultancies from Very Edible Gardens (VEG).

### **Contacts for materials and free stuff**

#### **Ethical timber**

Very Edible Gardens have precut Cypress macrocarpa, a sustainable timber sourced from farm shelter belts, as kitset vegie beds and chook houses. They also supply cheap timber fruit boxes as ready-made vegie beds. See [www.veryediblegardens.com](http://www.veryediblegardens.com) and [www.goldencypress.com.au](http://www.goldencypress.com.au). You can also try various scrap yards to find recycled timber.

### **Good organic gardening and permaculture books**

*Organic Gardening* by Peter Bennett

*The Permaculture Home Garden* by Linda Woodrow

*Backyard Poultry Naturally* by Alanna Moore

*The New Organic Gardener* by Tim Marshall

These are available through good bookshops.

### **Known issues: some bits not yet covered in this manual:**

*Insurance concerns / Charging for permablitzes / sponsorship of your permablitz / Disclaimers*

#### **Document Version**

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