

The Power of the Permablitz: Tips on how to organize your own party with a purpose

By Lisa DePiano

We had the perfect weather. It was a sunny breezy Saturday afternoon in May in the old mill town of Holyoke, Massachusetts. The leaves had just started to leaf out on the apple trees and the robins were singing in the spring. Twelve people moved together, each taking turns prying up and carrying chunks of driveway and placing it into the dumpster. Like worker bees harvesting nectar and pollen from a patch of flowers, they fell into a groove. The sound of music, laughter and banter filled the air. The last of the chunks of driveway were thrown into the dumpster right as the burgers, mushrooms and asparagus finished cooking on the grill.

In just one afternoon the group had successfully depaved a driveway and in its place planted the first phase of a forest garden. Instead of pavement there now was lush, green fruit trees, deep brown compost and wood chips and a freshly seeded cover crop understory. This is a scene from a permablitz.

A Permablitz (noun) dubbed by the Permablitz network in Melbourne, Australia is defined as: An informal gathering involving a day on which a group of at least two people come together to achieve the following:

- create or add to edible gardens where someone lives
- share skills related to permaculture and sustainable living
- build community networks
- have fun

The word comes from a contraction of *Perma* because of the permaculture reference and *blitz* meaning a time of focused activities. Its a demonstration of mutual aid and reciprocity, where people come and help one another implement a permaculture design and share and develop new skills. The concept of mutual aid and communal work behind the permablitz are practiced in many different cultures around the world. Including the Finnish *Talkoot*, the Kichwa, *Mink'a* and the *Gotong-royong* in Indonesia.

This “barnraising” embodies the permaculture principle of multiple functions. Not only does a site get an immediate boost but people get to meet each other and share and build skills, swap recipes and knit together the relationships that are at the core of any resilient community.

Do you need help implementing your permaculture vision? Are you interested in throwing your own permablitz? We put together the following tips from the pros to help your next permablitz be a smashing success.

Five tips for a successful Permablitz

1. **Plan, Plan, Plan did we mention plan:** That's right it might seem like things are just effortlessly flowing during the permablitz but it takes a fair amount of planning to make sure things go smooth the day of. Whether its developing clear roles and responsibilities for the host, facilitators and organizers to sourcing enough materials, putting in the work planning the event up front pays off with a successful day. Don't know where to start? No problem. The permablitz network in Melbourne have put together these great organizing guides We have found these super helpful.
2. **Let Go:** While having things planned is key, equally is knowing when to let go and stray from the plan. A little bit of magic happens at each permablitz and you need to be willing to make room for it to happen. Sometimes someone has an even more brilliant idea of how to do something or brings over a special plant that would be perfect for a polyculture. Part of the joy of the permablitz is letting go and allowing for that to happen.
3. **Right Project:** Not every project is right for a permablitz. Part of making it a success is figuring out which projects are the right fit. Sheet mulching a new planting area? Perfect! Careful leveling of the foundation your tiny house? Not so much! Its better to leave some of the more detailed finishing or set up for before or after the permablitz. Some of the best projects for a permablitz is something that a lot of people can get involved with such as building a hugelculture mound, depaving, digging a pond or mixing up a batch of cobb for a pizza oven.
4. **Right People:** That said we have a volunteer designer or craftsperson bottom line each project at a permablitz. This way we have someone who can teach attendees a bit about the goals of each project and keep an eye on both quality and the bigger picture. It also helps to take pressure off of the lead organizer and host. Plan to have an apprentice with the designer to train someone in that skill. Next time switch roles and have the apprentice lead with the designer filling in when needed.
5. **Food and Music:** Yes, everything is better with food and music. Especially good food and music and plenty of it. Pre meal snacks are great to keep the crowd going strong. We have done permablitz's both with the host providing the food and also as a potluck. Having a potluck is a fun way to swap new recipes of foraged delights or food that you have grown yourself. When it comes to music you can have a DJ's pumping tunes over speakers, live acoustic, sing alongs or at the very least a radio pumping out tunes. It's a great time for someone in your network to bust out their skills. That said know your crowd and pick out the music accordingly. There is nothing worse than annoying tunes blasting out your eardrums and volunteers.

Have fun and remember that there is a lot to learn in a permablitz. Many positive yields come out of this social/physical system. Everyone has a role to play. The people that are grilling up lunch or keeping an eye on the children are just as valued as the people doing the heavy lifting. It takes a network. That's the power of the permablitz.