

Introductions, icebreakers and energisers

Why use them?

Much of the learning that takes place in training workshops happens through the interactions of participants. It's useful for group facilitators to know a range of games and fun processes to use throughout their workshops to help people's learning.

These can include 'icebreakers' and introductions, which help people to

- learn each other's names
- get to know each other
- introduce people to the idea of collective learning
- build group energy, particularly at the beginning of a workshop, or the beginning of the day in longer training programs
- build community among people who will continue to work together at the garden
- help people become comfortable with each other, so they feel supported and safe in taking risks and experimenting with new ideas.

Energisers which can assist in

- reminding everyone to have fun – making it easier to learn
- building group energy
- helping people to focus after lunch breaks or after a long session of talking
- wake people who are losing concentration or falling asleep!
- relieve tension after a challenging session
- mark a transition between topics or sessions
- reinforce ideas or skills being learnt.

The games suggested below are often suited for a range of these purposes, can easily be adapted to meet the needs of the group.

Postcards

Spread out postcards or other pictures of gardens, permaculture projects, people, communities, etc and ask people to pick one that they relate to, that expresses something they like about community gardening. Each person briefly tells the group why they chose their picture. Can be useful as a lead in to discussion about people's visions for the garden, understandings about permaculture, hopes for community, etc, as well as being a way to learn more about people in the group.

Life stories

In groups of 3 or 4, ask each person to tell the story of their life as a journey to community gardening (or what ever the focus of the workshop is). The facilitator explains that they will let people know when it's time to change turns talking and that other group members are to listen attentively while each person shares their story. The facilitator could introduce the culture and importance of storytelling as a way of passing on knowledge.

Insects

Each person chooses an insect that they relate to in some way – you might specify it should express something about how they're feeling today, their role in the community garden. Each person acts out their insect while the others guess what they are, then the person briefly says why they chose that particular insect. You could also use animals, plants, etc

Ball throwing

Participants stand in a circle and throw a soft ball, hacky sack, or similar object saying a word for each throw. When starting a new group, this can be used as a way for people to learn each other's names, with people saying someone's name when they throw the ball to them, or using it as an opportunity to ask for someone's name if they've forgotten. Don't throw the ball twice to the same person before everyone's had a turn. With a group that already knows each other's names, use this process with 'garden' or 'community' words – each person has to come up with a new word. Introduce another ball or two when people start to get good...

Have you ever...?

Arrange chairs (or cushions) in a circle so there is one for each participant, excluding the facilitator. The facilitator stands in the centre of the circle and completes the question 'Have you ever...?' Everyone who has must get up and switch chairs. They cannot return to the chair they left or the ones next to it. The person left without a chair must ask the question again. You might choose a specific focus for the questions (eg gardening: have you ever made compost in the rain, have you ever planted broccoli) or to leave it open to what ever people want to know about each other...

Human bingo

Give each person a bingo card (photocopy this one or create your own). Instruct people to find a person who answers yes to one of the questions, and ask them to tell you a story about it. When someone gets a yes for a question, they must move to a new person. The first person to find someone who can say yes to each of the questions wins – but they must be able to remember something about each of the stories behind the answers. The facilitator should encourage people to enjoy hearing people's stories rather than rushing to bingo!

Human Bingo Card		
Speaks a language other than English	Has been in a newspaper, on radio or tv	Is a volunteer
Can name a plant local to the area	Grows veggies at home	Has a child/children
Has made compost	Has carpentry skills	Has a favourite plant

These are just a few ideas. There are many resources for more. Make a point of collecting processes you see other facilitators using – and give credit to them when you use them.

Resources

The Manual For Teaching Permaculture Creatively Robin Clayfield and Skye Queensland: Earthcare Education 1995

Robin Clayfield and Skye (1995) Earthcare Education, Qld. Has many ideas for creative processes, with a particular focus on permaculture, but relevant for all training. Highly recommended.

Silver Bullets Karl Rohnke Kendal/Hunt Publications 1984

A classic source for trust games, co-operative exercises, and group processes

From: **claire nettle** (2009) *Growing Community: Starting and nurturing community gardens*, Adelaide: Health SA, Government of South Australia and Community and Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association Inc.

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