PARK(ing) Day
Assembly Manual

and Streetscape Intervention Toolkit
The Big Idea Behind PARK(ing) Day

More than 70% of most cities’ outdoor space is dedicated to the private vehicle while only a fraction of that land is allocated to open space for people.

Around the world, inexpensive curbside parking results in increased traffic, wasted fuel and more pollution. It’s time to rethink the way streets are used! A metered parking spot is an inexpensive short-term lease for a 10’x20’ plot of land. Imagine what you can do in a space usually dedicated to private vehicle storage.

Motivated by the desire to exploit the metered parking space as a site for art, activism, and cultural expression, Rebar offers Park(ing) Day as a prototype for open source urban design accessible to all. In response, thousands of people around the globe have created hundreds of parks and formed an international event: Park(ing) Day. The event continues to spread virally, through the Internet and word of mouth. Since its inception, Park(ing) has become a global experiment in reprogramming vehicular space for social exchange, recreation and artistic expression.

Rebar invites you to participate. What you create is limited only by your imagination—the future of this grassroots movement is in your hands. While Park(ing) Day may be temporary, the image of the possibilities it offers have lasting effects and are changing the way streets are understood. We challenge you to explore the dimensions of ecological sustainability, design and creative vision in the humble parking spot.
By approaching the parking spot as a short-term lease, we sought to explore the range of possible occupancy activities for this unique category of urban space. And, in a discovery that was as emboldening as it was surprising, the San Francisco Traffic Code did not appear to expressly exclude other uses for the metered parking space beyond the storage of the private vehicle.1

Yet ... what to do in the space? Early ideas, like many Rebar inventions, ran the gamut from clever to ridiculous – an aquarium, a public bed, a brothel, and an office cube. We eventually narrowed to the concept of the public park, to offer the daily users of the downtown habitat a place to relax and do nothing. In early discussions, we considered a variety of park typologies and topologies, including a national park (complete with a redwood tree) and—in a microcosmic ode to our home city—a park with rolling hillocks and valleys. Ultimately we chose to deploy to most commonly recognizable cultural signifiers of a typical urban park – grass, a bench and a tree.
Armed with an official San Francisco City map that describes the areas of downtown that are underserved by public open space, we set out to identify an appropriate site for the intervention. After a few bicycle trips around the city, we identified a spot on Mission Street near 1st Street that was sunny during the lunchtime hours and, importantly, adjacent to a rooftop parking garage that would provide an excellent vantage from which to capture the project with still photos and video.

Midday on November 16, 2005, equipped with fresh living turf, a rented bench and a rented tree, we set down our park and stepped across the street to watch the park interact with its new urban situation. At first, passersby reacted with a mix of indifference and curiosity. Eventually several people ventured into the “park,” found a place to sit and took a place to enjoy the novelty of cool grass and shade. Some of the strangers enjoyed some unplanned social interaction by exchanging a few words with each other; others took the occasion to rest or read. After two hours and having generated 24,000 “square foot-minutes” of public open space, Rebar dismantled the park and returned the space to its normative function. All that remained of the incident were the photos and video footage shot. We posted these on our website as a record of the experiment.

Within several weeks a seminal photo had appeared in dozens of references on the Internet and news stories. Within six months Rebar had received hundreds of inquiries about the project, which we dubbed Park(ing), from individuals and groups around the world. The combination of the iconic image of parking-space-as-park and its accompanying descriptive name created a “sticky” idea that transmitted readily across electronic media. Without much explanation, other groups disposed to guerrilla intervention quickly grasped the basic tactic.
The History of PARK(ing) Day

Still, the amount of interest Rebar received warranted some codification of the idea, so we posted a short “how-to” manual on our website to help others get started. The essence of the tactic was to legally claim a parking space using materials that were symbolically associated with parks—trees, lawn, and a bench. Rebar treated the idea itself as open source and applied a Creative Commons license: as long as it was not used for profit, we allowed it to be replicated by anyone, anywhere.

The following year, in collaboration with The Trust for Public Land (a national conservation non-profit organization) Rebar organized a one-day, global event in which participants—mostly in San Francisco but now joined by groups in other cities around the United States and Europe—built temporary parks in parking spaces, in a coordinated effort to produce a greater critical mass and to demonstrate solidarity with the effort to reprogram urban parking spaces.

In each of the 47 cities where Park(ing) Day took place in 2006, different legal codes had to be negotiated by the participants: the traffic codes in San Francisco were different than those in London, New York, or Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Nowhere, however, did participants meet with significant opposition to their installations, which ranged from a do-it-yourself lemonade stand to stormwater demonstration gardens to a seed giveaway. The event effectively operated within an undervalued niche space and successfully exploited a legal loophole—a tactic at once radical but superficially unthreatening to the system of spatial commodification it critiqued. Although the space we collectively allocate to parking—how much, where, for whom and at what cost—is usually hotly contested, Park(ing) Day operated within a discrete units of that contested terrain, neutralizing potential backlash with a sense of humor and the honest application of a simple and uncontested market rule: just as it is completely within the rights of individuals to buy up shares of a publicly-traded company, Park(ing) Day participants paid meters and exercised their option to do something other than park cars in real estate that they, for the moment, owned.

In 2007, ongoing widespread interest in Park(ing) concentrated in San Francisco but also now coming from Europe and other American cities led us to organize an even larger scale event when people around the world would temporarily turn parking spaces into parks. With help from partner organizations such as The Trust for Public Land and Public Architecture and the Black Rock Arts Foundation, Rebar set a date for the event (September 21st, the equinox) and facilitated the participation of hundreds of volunteers by holding community organizing sessions in San Francisco and distributing how-to information on the web. In all, more than 200 parks were constructed on September 21, 2007—entirely by volunteers—in over 50 cities worldwide. The installations ranged from dinner parties to croquet courses, dog parks to massage parlors, community health clinics to urban micro-farms. Some participants did insinuate advertising and business promotion into their installations (in Florida, for example, a Starbucks set up a park). But what most of the Park(ing) Day installations had in common was a sense of humor and the promotion of some kind of artistic, ecological, social or cultural agenda. The playful yet passionate tone of the event first set in 2005 continues to resonate each year.

1 In contrast, see, e.g., the Rules of New York, which specify that “It shall be unlawful for any person to ... prevent any vehicle from parking on a public street ... by placing any box, can, crate, hand-cart, dolly or any other device, including unauthorized pavement, curb or street markings or signs in the roadway.” The Rules of New York, 34 54-80 (n) (7).
Turn a Parking Spot into a PARK(ing) Space!

PARK(ing) Assembly Manual

Thank you for taking an interest in building a PARK(ing) space in your local urban environment. Rebar wishes to support your endeavor in whatever way possible, and have developed this handy guide to help you.

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PART I - Choosing the Spot

Find a metered parking spot in an ideal sunny location for people to stop, rest, relax, and do nothing. Check to see if your city planning agency (or other open space advocacy group) has a map of areas underserved by public open space.

Make contacts! You may be surprised how receptive people are to your PARK(ing) idea.

Other things to consider about the location are:

1. **Type of metered space:** is it a 2-hour spot or a 1/2 hour drop-off spot. We do not suggest “No-Stopping” zones, loading zones or commuter lanes.

2. **People you are trying to serve:** downtown office workers, tourists, the down and out, or the high-rollers. When will they be around to see and use the space?

3. **Surveillance:** are there nearby spots for you or your friends to take pictures or video of the installation?

4. **Other environmental conditions:** sun, shade, wind, weather, traffic, construction.
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PART II - Building Materials

The fundamental elements of a good outdoor public space are seating, shade, a place to watch people and view scenery, and a sense of being in nature.

For Rebar’s first PARK(ing), we installed 200 sq. ft of lawn, a 24” box/15’ tall tree, a park bench and an enclosing boundary. We also produced signs to indicate to the public that this space was created for their use and enjoyment and to invite them to feed the meter to keep the PARK open.

1. Groundcover

Even a small piece of lawn can transform the hard concrete or asphalt into a soft, green oasis. Other bits of nature that may work are moss, potted plants, sand, or anything that will feel good to bare feet. Other PARK(ing) Day participants have used quilts, pools, gravel, carpets and astroturf.

Tips on using sod:

Sod is available from garden centers for around $2.00 for a 1x5 ft roll.

Be sure to place a tarp under the sod to prevent absorption of chemicals from the roadway into the sod’s matting.
Seating

The more seating you provide, the greater the chance of unplanned interaction among PARK(ing) visitors. Good used park benches can be obtained on the Internet or rented from a film/theatre prop rental shop. Also, don’t be afraid to utilize “Big Box” retailers with liberal return policies – perhaps you can buy a bench for your PARK(ing) and return it for a full refund when you are finished.
Shade

Some nurseries will lease trees by the day or week. Check with your local nursery to find a sturdy tree with abundant foliage for shade. Bamboo or a large indoor plant may work in your climate. Choose a tree you will be able to move and manage easily.
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Enclosure
Plastic bollards linked with rope (AKA traffic tubes, available here for about $15/each) potted plants, or any self-supporting boundary is important to provide a sense of enclosure and safety for visitors to your PARK(ing) space.

Signs
Indicating that this space has been transformed from a parking spot to a PARK(ing) space for public enjoyment and inviting visitors to feed the meter.

Spare change
Don’t forget to bring change to feed the meter to get things rolling before your visitors arrive.

Please make sure you have a plan to reuse, recycle, or donate the materials - such as the sod and tree - after your PARK(ing) project is complete!
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PART III - Planning the Event

Things you should consider organizing in advance are:

1. Sourcing materials like tree, lawn and bench at least a week or two in advance;

2. Transportation for the materials to and from the site;

3. Friends or collaborators to arrive early at the site to hold a space and to help you setup and cleanup;

4. People to photograph/document the event;
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A plan for talking to people who come by your Park(ing) Space. Who might want to talk to you?

- Curious bystanders
- People who want to get involved in Park(ing) Day
- Traffic and law enforcement personnel
- People wondering why you’re taking up a perfectly good parking spot.

You are acting in the public interest to add to the health, comfort and vitality of your city!

Put forward the positive aspect of your action and remember that skeptical critics can turn into key supporters and allies if you win them over. Your generous and creative act can set the tone for other people’s positive experience of public space, so appeal to their best instincts: civic pride, artistic expression, caring for others.

Explaining Park(ing) Day
You are part of a world-wide movement to improve the quality of the public realm and take back the streets for people. Your Park(ing) space is also a unique expression of your own ideas, creativity and identity. Think ahead to how you will easily explain what’s happening to curious, skeptical or appreciative audiences you’ll encounter out there.
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Talking to Authorities

Understand the laws governing your city’s parking spaces. Authority figures are usually concerned with safety, so be prepared to share your plans to keep people out of harm. We recommend appealing to law enforcement’s sense of civic pride rather than antagonizing them. Remember, you’re not protesting—you’re using your public space to improve the quality of life for people!

Addressing People’s Concerns

If you encounter negativity or hostility from anyone, try to find out what their concerns really are. They may or may not understand what Park(ing) Day is about. If you are comfortable doing so, engage in a dialogue with them.

Generosity and Humor

You are the face of Park(ing) Day. No matter what goes wrong, take it easy, have fun, and laugh. You may find you soon have a lot of company.

TRUE STORY!

One Park(ing) group in San Francisco outstayed their 2-hour meter and were asked by the parking patrol to move their hanging garden park...which they did, with the help of a dozen people. They found a new parking space, and fed the meter of course!
6 A place to donate the materials when the project is over. Living plants, turf and/or groundcover can returned or permanently planted in yards – or better yet donated to schools or neighbors who need them.

7 Tools like a broom (for cleanup), clippers or a pocket knife. Be prepared to problem-solve! If you plan to clean up after dark, bring flashlights. If you’ll use bicycles for transportation, remember lights and reflectors.

8 An After Party! Where will you meet up with other Park(ers) to celebrate?
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**PART IV - Installation**

*Arrive early to secure your ideal space. A couple of strategies for installing PARK(ing) in heavy traffic are to:*

1. **Obtain two or more spots.** One spot to temporarily park your transport vehicle and one (or more) for PARK(ing);
2. **Alternatively, pull up alongside your spot.** Turn on your blinkers, and place traffic safety cones or saw horses for safe unloading.

1. **Begin feeding the meter.**
2. **Set up the boundary.** This helps cars see your installation and keeps users from straying into traffic.
3. **First lay down a tarp or plastic if your installation is has loose soil—this will make cleanup easier.**
4. **Lay down the ground covering within your Park(ing) spot.** People have used turf, native plants, carpet, wooden platforms, stones—even swimming pools. Whatever you use, set your Park(ing) spot apart with textures and colors that are different from the surrounding asphalt and concrete. Soft, comfortable surfaces help people enjoy your Park longer. You may need garden tools to do a neat job.
5. **Unload the tree or trees, if you’re using them.** Large trees can be VERY heavy and will require 3-4 people to move safely and efficiently. Site them so they provide shade for the duration of your installation.
6. **Place the seating, set up the boundary, then place your signs inviting the public enjoy the PARK you have just created for them.**
Turn a Parking Spot into a PARK(ing) Space!

5 Now sit back, relax and enjoy! People may be profoundly indifferent, nonchalant, curious or overwhelmingly excited by your PARK. You may wish to provide them with an explanatory flyer or an email, website or mailing address to contact you for more information.

6 Don’t forget to feed the meter!
Once the meter expires, the sun has gone behind a building, or you have been asked to leave by the police or traffic authorities, load your tree, roll up the turf, and pick up the bench. Carefully sweep up any dirt or debris, and then dismantle the boundary structure. If you are returning a tree to the nursery, take care not to damage it while loading.

Ideally you have lined up a place to donate any materials that you don’t plan to keep or reuse. Once you have dropped off all the materials, returned equipment, and cleaned up, take the time to thank all of your friends and collaborators.

Don’t you want to celebrate? You and your friends have worked hard—why not meet up with other Park(ing) Day participants and share stories about the day?
PART VI - Getting the Word Out

If you take pictures or video of your PARK(ing), please send them to Rebar at:
parking@rebargroup.org

We will post pictures and stories about your PARK(ing) project on the Rebar site, and provide a link to your local organization/website.

We would also like to incorporate your video into a larger documentary project on the nascent PARK(ing) movement. Please email us for more information on the documentary.

Online groups for planning Park(ing) Day and networking with participants exist in many cities already. If you can’t find one in your city, start your own! Google groups is a good platform. Use your network to share photos, ideas and stories before and after the event. You may find allies and friends who have more in common with you than just Park(ing) Day.

Now get out there and start PARK(ing)!
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Space planner

Use the pieces on the following pages to plan out ideas for your PARK(ing) Space. Draw, color, think big! Then share your vision with us and the world.

Send your designs to parkingday@rebargroup.org.
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Further Reading

The Trust for Public Land - www.tpl.org
Public Architecture - www.publicarchitecture.org
Permanent Breakfast - www.p-breakfast.net
Roadwitching - www.wormworks.com/roadwitch/index.html
(P)LOT by Michael Rakowitz - www.michaelrakowitz.com
Bonnie Sherk - www.alivinglibrary.org/LivLib_home.html
Jane Martin/PlantSF - www.plantsf.org
Urban Prescriptions - www.recetasurbanas.net
Graffiti Research Lab - www.graffitiresearchlab.com
Wooster Collective - www.woostercollective.com