

# PINA Design Contest 2025

Welcome to the **Annual Permaculture Design Contest** brought to you by The Permaculture Institute of North America! This year we have two great prizes and two great tracks.

Track One: Experienced Designers using the theme "**Effective and Innovative Biochar Solutions in Permaculture Design**" within your design. We want to help support and showcase YOUR permaculture project. Simply incorporate biochar into 1 aspect of your design and submit your design here for the chance to win **\$7,500!** Need ideas for how to submit biochar? [Click here.](#)

Track Two: New Designers (you've received your PDC within 3 years) with no emphasis on biochar. This design can be anything or project you are working on and would like to showcase and take to its next iteration! Simply submit your design here for the chance to win **\$2,500!** This can be your design from your PDC or any other design you are working on.

**Submit your design by October 15th at midnight to enter.**

Top 5 winners in each category will receive prizes including seeds from our sponsor Bakers Creek and more!

[Rules & Regulations](#)

Email \*

ethanjacob999@gmail.com

**Project Lead:** First and Last Name (must be a current PINA member & a PDC grad) \*

Ethan Cohen

**Phone Number:** \*

9086709114

**PDC Info:** Date and location where you completed your first PDC, and name of primary instructor(s) \*

Oregon State University, 2022, Andrew Millison

**Choose a Design Submission Track.** Are you submitting a Design as a New Designer or an Experienced Designer? \*

New Designer Track (took PDC within the past 3 years)

Experienced Designer Track (took PDC over 3 years ago)

Other: .....

**Title of Design:** \*

Suburban Ecoscape

**Location of Design:** Where will your design be implemented? (Region/Country or City/State/Country) \*

Highlands Ranch, Colorado, USA

**Summary of Your Design Narrative:** Please provide a summary of your design in 500 words or less. \*

*What goals does it achieve? What problems does it solve? Who is the community that is impacted? Who are your partners/collaborators? AND how does biochar fit in (if you are in the Experienced Designer Track)?*

This project reimagines a quarter-acre lot in Highlands Ranch, Colorado as a model of how regenerative design can succeed even under HOA restrictions. The clients, a young couple, wanted to cut their water bill in half, reduce their turfgrass while keeping gathering space, replace high-input lawn with natives, and grow food in abundance. The design achieves all four goals while creating a landscape that is beautiful, compliant, and productive.

The design addresses problems common across the region: limited rainfall, alkaline clay-loam soils, and the heavy water demands of conventional Kentucky Bluegrass yards. A 1,500 square foot roof harvests nearly 16,000 gallons of rain annually, directed into barrels, basins, swales, and wicking beds. Greywater reuse adds another steady source, while drip irrigation ensures efficiency. Together, these strategies are projected to cut water demand by 50 percent. Three thousand square feet of lawn are removed and replaced with native gardens and productive food guilds, while 2,000 square feet remain, overseeded with clover for resilience and play.

Food production is layered throughout: espaliered fruit trees create a privacy hedge and windbreak, berries and vines edge the property, and herbs and perennial vegetables fill beds. A small greenhouse and hoop house extend the harvest, with yields expected to reach 500 pounds annually. Over seventy drought-tolerant natives provide year-round color, soil fertility, and pollinator habitat.

The impact extends far beyond one family. This project demonstrates to neighbors and the wider community that abundance, water savings, and ecological health can thrive on small suburban lots within HOA limits. Its visibility and accessibility make it a catalyst for conversations about sustainability where it matters most—at home.


Partners include local volunteers, neighbors, and regional nurseries. Their involvement not only reduces costs but builds skills and ownership, turning the installation into a collaborative community effort.

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**Site Analysis and Assessment:** Tell us about the current conditions of the land. Please include \* something about the Climate, Soil, Water, Sectors, Zones of Use/Access and Circulation, Existing Plants, and Social Conditions involved in your project.

The site is a quarter-acre suburban lot in Highlands Ranch, Colorado, situated at 5,900 feet in a semi-arid steppe climate. Annual precipitation averages only seventeen inches, with hot summers, cold winters, and prevailing winds from the north-northwest. The soils are clay-loam with high alkalinity (pH 7.9), low organic matter (1.5%), and moderate water-holding capacity, meaning they tend to store moisture but can shed it quickly if not managed properly. These conditions create both challenges and opportunities for water harvesting and perennial planting. The property is also subject to HOA regulations, particularly in the front yard, which require plantings to maintain a conventional ornamental character. Together, these climatic, soil, and social factors shape a design that must conserve water, build fertility, and provide ecological and productive abundance while fitting into the aesthetic expectations of a suburban neighborhood.

**Full Design Narrative and Scope:** Please upload your full design proposal here. Please \* include a section in your design that outlines how you plan to incorporate biochar.

 Design Narrative ...

 Add file

**Design Graphic(s):** Upload any maps, drawings, or graphics you would like to include. \*

We understand that not everyone does this professionally and that we will receive a wide variety of styles and quality. Just do your best to give us a visual representation of the project.

Please send your files as PDFs.

 Design Contest S...

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**Photos:** Upload any photos you would like to include. (Preferred file types: JPEG, PNG)

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**Budget:** The winner will receive award money to kick-start their design. Consider this seed money to implement a key portion of your larger vision/design (*\$7,500 for Experienced Track; \$2,500 for New Designer Track*). \*

*How would you spend the Grand Prize to implement your design in the next year? Please be as detailed as possible.*

#### Line-item budget

- Mulch, 12 yd: \$240
- Compost, 6 yd: \$180
- Drip kit + filter/PR/timer: \$450
- Gutter diverter + overflow hardware: \$150
- Drain tile + geotextile (key runs only): \$180
- Trellis materials: \$250
- Plants: 20 cordon trees, ~15 berries, ~400 native plugs, ~100 edible perennials: \$1,050

Total: \$2,500

#### 12-month schedule

- Months 1–2: Sod cut grass, roto-till, broad fork, amend soil.
- Months 3–4: Retrofit irrigation, cut basins + swales, set diverter/overflow.
- Months 5–6: Install drip, trellis, plant trees + berries + first natives/edibles, mulch heavy.
- Months 7–12: Add more plants, tune irrigation, maintain.

#### Outputs and proof

- Water: Roof yield infiltrated in basins/swales; drip + wicking bed reduce use; aim 35–50% cut pending planting density.
  - Food: 6 espalier starters + berries; staged expansion in year 2.
  - Habitat: ~300 natives in the highest-visibility/front beds to satisfy HOA and show bloom.
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I have read and agree to the RULES, TERMS, and CONDITIONS - <https://pina.in/rules/?> \*

Yes, I will use the award money to implement my design & agree to the terms linked.

In order to submit your design, you MUST be a member of PINA at any level. Are you a current PINA member? [Become a member here for as little as \\$20 a year.](#) \*

Yes

No

Not Sure

How did you find out about the Design Contest? Were you referred by someone? If so, who? \*

From the PINA website

**Feedback:** any comments or suggestions for this submission process?

**Thank you for your entry!**



Thank you for the opportunity!

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