

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 *

hello@permastudio.com

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

Megan Gilger

Phone Number: *

231-633-7702

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

Cornell University - Monica Ibacache

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: *

The Cottonwood Forest Garden - A New Vineyard Model

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

Leelanau County, Michigan, United States

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)?


The Cottonwood Forest Garden has a few projects, as the land offers plenty of space and ideas to take into account for planning. With my design for this, my goal was to challenge our monocrop thinking that is heavily prevalent in the grape growing industry. In these current systems it require heavy spraying, limited harvesting options for farmers, and puts heavy pressure on a quickly shrinking landscape with a growing industry. In this design, I wanted to create pattern system that could be replicated and build a polyculture design that could be repeated on a small or large scale. The hope is we look at the forest, mimic it, bring in more crop harvests to diversify crop offerings for struggling farmers, and lower our need for chemical usage, tillage, and add work for weeding, mowing, etc. In the design there is 1 side that will offer a permanent crop harvest of asparagus or it could be left open (just with clover or perennial rye) when applicable, 1 row with varying herbs and perennial wild flowers. Adding in trees for trellising will give us a chance to harvest multiple items at once during harvest time (hazelnuts, apples, grapes, herbs, and more). We would graze the vineyard in the spring with chickens rather than sheep because of the time of bud break doesn't allow for proper growth of an undergrowth for the sheep to graze, but chickens will provide nutrient to the soil and not care about grazing material. Other partners will be fellow winemakers and harvesters in the local community. The hope is to inspire a new way to approach growing in our region.

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.

In the full design narrative you can learn about all the details of the land on a deeper level, but on a high level, because of our location to Lake Michigan, there are lots of microclimates in the region. In fact there will be frost 2-3 weeks before in the lower areas of the land compared to the hill top, which usually sees a hard frost in mid- November. We are also part of a deep artisan spring that feeds Mann Creek which runs into the watershed of Lake Leelanau. This is about 100 feet below the hill in terms of elevation. The land was previously cleared for lumber but in the lower cooler parts of the land have spodosols that are more conducive for pine tree growth and we have a gorgeous stand of white pines. The hills lend to healthy water movement to lower sections for ponds and swales to plant into with this model. The rest of the existing plants, zones of permanence, and more are within the Full Design Narrative.

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. *


 Megan Gilger - C...

 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.


 Vineyard System ...


 Add file

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

 IMG_4284 - Meg...

 IMG_5091 - Meg...

 IMG_5089 - Meg...

 Add file

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.

I would be using the money to purchase grape varieties that I believe from my research and guidance from mentors that would be the base our project based on soil and microclimate research. We plan to do some propagation work, but we will need some start up funds to get a few varieties of grapes we feel will do best in the model. Each plant costs about \$13-16 so all funds will go towards getting these plants in the spring.

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? *

Monica Ibacache

Feedback: any comments or suggestions for this submission process?

I did this project as part of my practicum for Cornell this spring, and since then we actually located land that is near our's which we will be using this project to guide us. Some of this will be redesigned but since it has many similarities we feel it will be a strong guide for the work ahead of us. There are already existing vines and trellising material, pole barn, and it has been being grazed now for 10 years by horses who live nearby (see the photos I uploaded). We will take propagated plants from our existing land (hazelnuts and hawthorns to create hedge systems to keep out the deer) to this zoned agricultural property. The zoning was a major hinderance in the success of this design and project since where our home resides is not zoned ag, but now we feel it will easily take shape especially because we integrate livestock without breaking zoning rules. We want the space to be a place for other farmers and land stewards to learn, but also to create a product of permaculture and biodynamic grown grapes for wine as well as many other complimentary products in the future.

Thank you for your entry!



Thank you for creating this opportunity!

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