

# The Boulder County BUSINESS REPORT

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## Landscaper sets the PACE with Ecoscaping

**W**hen you think of green building, images of bamboo flooring, energy-efficient appliances, and recycled materials come to mind.

For Ecoscape Environmental Design, a PACE-certified (Partners for A Clean Environment) landscaping company, green building conjures images of day-lilies, granny smith apples and fresh culinary herbs right outside of your door. With their roots taking hold in the local landscaping industry, Ecoscape is seeking to change the way people think about landscaping. Weaving together the ecology of plants, soil, fungi and forest ecosystems, they aim to create landscapes that thrive in our local environment while minimizing external needs such as fertilizers and water.

Although Ecoscape has been designing landscapes locally for several years, it was not until last year that they truly bloomed. Their conversion into a complete design and build firm was further complemented by the acquisition of Pine Mountain Contractors, which offers them the ability to address all aspects of land enhancement and care. They now offer not only quality landscapes, but wildfire mitigation and holistic forest management strategies, ecological rehabilitation, noxious weed management and many other land services.

Owner and lead designer Bill Melvin takes a unique tact to his landscape designing. Tapping from his knowledge of Permaculture, a model for sustainable living design, Melvin applies a unique strategy of companion planting that he feels offers an Ecoscape many benefits over a typical landscape.

Integrating plant species that attract beneficial insects and deter pests, eliminating the need for any pesticides, combined with plants that pull nitrogen from the air and others that draw minerals from deep in the soil, a symbiotic relationship is established. This allows his landscape to be passively fed while greatly eliminating outside resources. This is especially effective when combined with edible landscapes that naturally require more soil building.

In our semi-arid climate, Ecoscape has found creative ways to stretch their landscapes water budgets. With roughly 50 percent of our water resources being used in our landscapes, this is nothing to bat an eye at. Whereas many landscape designers seek to shed water from a site, designer and owner of Ecoscape, Melvin seeks to utilize every drop of water that falls from the sky. "Dry creeks strategically



PHOTO: BILL MELVIN

This dry creek channels 75% of the house's roof water through the front yard filled with native ornamentals, edibles and culinary plants.

designed into a landscape can provide not only an elegant, flowing focal point to your property, but also passively feed adjacent plantings by channeling your roof water to where it can be utilized. Why would anyone want to miss this opportunity in our climate?"

Not many people realize the plethora of fruits, nuts and berries that can be grown in this climate, and at altitude. At 7,200 feet in the mountains west of Boulder, Melvin has successfully cultivated more than 10 different varieties of fruits, a dozen varieties of berries, and a wealth of medicinal and culinary herbs. By the enthusiasm shared, he obviously enjoys sharing his passion for edible and ecological design through teaching at the Denver Botanic Gardens and at our local universities.

"Manipulating microclimates is a key strategy to successful growing at this altitude. When you learn to harvest the sun and water from the sky, then you can truly enjoy an abundant harvest from the Earth," states Melvin emphatically with a smile.



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