

Local landscaper gets the nod from Suzuki

Barrie woman wins national contest

BY IAN MCINROY

Transforming her home into an oasis of trees, shrubs and plants has put a Barrie woman on the national stage.

Melanie Rekola's lifetime love of the environment has led to her winning a category in the David Suzuki Digs My Garden contest.

Thousands of Canadians from coast-to-coast were asked to enter their environmentally friendly home landscaping success stories.

The nationwide photo/story competition had four categories: luscious lawns (eco-friendly alternatives), vo-

luminous vegetables (growing your own food), outstanding ornamentals (being nice to pollinators such as hummingbirds, bees and butterflies), and balcony bliss (cutting down of urban heat effect).

All submissions were to be free of pesticides, herbicides and fungicides.

Rekola got the good news about her entry yesterday. She won the balcony bliss award, and the view from there shows much of the hard work the couple has put into their love of all things green.

It was gratifying for her to be recognized by someone many Canadians consider to be a champion of the environment.

"David Suzuki has been my idol since I was a small child. He has influ-

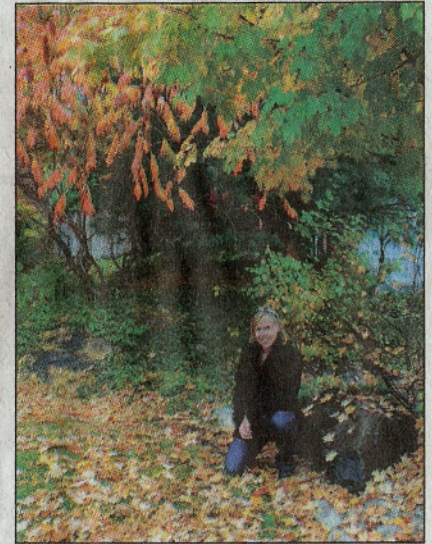
enced me all my years. He is so passionate about the environment and all living things," she said.

Rekola, and her husband, Andrew Beattie, worked together on the makeover of the 50-foot by 115-foot lot in the south-west part of the city, ensuring it was chemical-free and lush with plants.

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IAN MCINROY PHOTO

Melanie Rekola sits in her front yard surrounded by trees, shrubs and plants that she and her husband planted.



22 trees provide enough shade

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"Seven years ago, this lot was void of plant life. Now, inside this small and private space, we have 22 large trees, including many native species, and five fruiting trees," she said, looking over her balcony into the backyard.

Forty yards of topsoil was sculpted into the front yard, the trees of which almost conceal the home from the road. In the back, 25 tonnes of limestone block line one side.

Larger sized white pine, oak, eastern red bud and other trees and shrubs were planted to provide shade.

"We couldn't even sit in the backyard — which faces south — in the summer because it was so hot," she said.

"Our garden now has comfortable shade and our home is protected from sun and wind," Rekola said. "We can eat our own organically grown fruits and vegetables. Wildlife choose to reside here, much to our children's delight. Here in the garden we watch life.

It's ever changing, ever growing."

Reducing the environmental footprint of their project was important, she added.

Rekola said she's been an environmentalist all her life.

"I was raised that way. My parents also grew a lot of their own food when I was growing up," she said.

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