

GLACIER VIEW MEADOWS HISTORY OF THE DEMONSTRATION GARDEN

In 1997, the Glacier View Meadows (GVM) Ecology Committee created the Demonstration Garden. The garden's purpose is to demonstrate native and non-native plants that are adaptable to GVM's climate and environment and, in the case of non-native perennials, have the best chance of survival. All plants are rated for high elevation and USDA plant hardiness zones 3 and 4 and are considered Xeriscape—water-wise, drought tolerant, and low maintenance once established.

Funding from the GVM Road and Recreation Board along with a \$1,000 grant awarded by the Larimer County Open Lands Program enabled the Committee to begin the project. Additional small grants from the County allowed further garden expansion and construction of a perimeter fence.

The initial garden design was provided by Creekside Garden Center in north Fort Collins. Working around a lone native tree—an upright juniper—native and non-native trees, shrubs, and perennials were chosen to complement the natural landscape and provide contrast in form, color and texture.

Native vegetation provides many benefits. In addition to adaptability to GVM's elevation, terrain, soil, and wind, they offer the greatest chance of survival due to their genetic origin and ability to withstand fluctuations in temperature, especially a cold, wet spring or an unusually hot, dry summer. Native plants also provide biodiversity and can grow successfully without amended soil. Additionally, they provide food, cover, and nesting sites for native wildlife and encourage the presence of native insects and microorganisms that benefit plants and keep them healthy without the need for chemical fertilizers and pesticides. They are also less susceptible to disease.

Over the years many non-native perennials have come and gone in the garden, their demise attributed to various factors—limited water, desiccating winds, root rot from moisture retention from snowpack, too much or too little sun or shade—all of which underscore the value of native vegetation. That said, there remain a few hardy non-native plants that continue to re-emerge yearly (see garden flower ID handout) having survived the vagaries of Mother Nature.

In 2014, the committee decided to let the garden revert to a more natural state that would require less oversight and maintenance, although pruning and weeding are necessary to avoid an overgrown and unkempt appearance. There are a few native wildflowers and shrubs (wax currant) that have emerged voluntarily. Wildflowers/ground cover include fringed sage, aster (purple and yellow), fendler grousel, penstemon (blue mist), pasque flower, pussytoes, sulphur flower, western wallflower, white yarrow, and sticky geranium. Previously planted spring bulbs, namely daffodils, provide a much-appreciated burst of color following winter's frozen palette.

The demonstration garden will always be a work in progress. Both native and non-native shrubs and plants have served as useful experiments. As plants die out, others have been substituted. Of particular challenge has been proper siting of plants to promote best growing conditions. Equally problematic are plants that produce prolific suckers and choke out other vegetation. It's a continual task to evaluate plants, soil conditions, weather patterns, overgrown vegetation, and restricted space and then decide necessary next steps. There is also seasonal maintenance to keep the garden looking tidy.

Interested GVM property owners who enjoy gardening are invited to join our efforts in garden rejuvenation. All are welcomed! The Ecology Committee meets monthly April-October. For more information, contact the GVM office at 493-6812.