

LANDSCAPING IN GLACIER VIEW MEADOWS THINGS TO CONSIDER

Yes! It's possible to create interesting and colorful landscapes in Glacier View Meadows (GVM) using the principles of Xeriscape design (water wise, drought tolerant, low maintenance) and native and non-native plants that are adaptable to and harmonious with GVM's natural environment.

The GVM Demonstration Garden showcases native and non-native plants. A plant ID guide with descriptions and photos is available in the information box at the garden.

Variables to consider in designing your landscape include watering needs, terrain, climate, wildlife, the use of native and non-native plants, and how to create defensible space around your house to mitigate wildfire.

Water

The use of water in GVM is governed by a decision of the Colorado Supreme Court. Under that decision, and resulting Plan of Augmentation, use of water is restricted to domestic, in-home activities. Although watering for most outside uses is prohibited, it is permissible to use outside watering to start new trees/shrubs and to re-vegetate disrupted soils following construction. Because the GVM Water and Sewer Association owns the water rights associated with individual and community wells, any questions regarding outdoor water use should be directed to the GVM office.

Terrain/Soil

Glacier View Meadows is situated at roughly 6,500-7,600 feet above sea level and is part of Colorado's Montane zone, which stretches from 6,000 feet to 9,500 feet. Throughout the upper foothills and mountains of this zone, several ecosystems of flora can be found. Indigenous trees include Ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, and Rocky Mountain juniper. Aspen groves are usually situated in areas that retain moisture. A colorful tapestry of native shrubs and trees, grasses, wildflowers, and groundcovers are prevalent despite elevation gain.

Much of the soil in GVM is decomposed granite, which is rocky and sandy and throughout GVM the terrain can be very different—from shady, damp aspen groves and open meadows to massive rock outcroppings and steep, hot, dry south-facing slopes. Even properties within the same filing can have unique property characteristics, a fact to keep in mind when designing your landscape.

A plant that does well on one property may not do equally well on another.

Climate

The GVM climate can be harsh with intense sunshine, little rain, seemingly unending wind, and fluctuating temperatures. Most of the 15-25 inches of annual precipitation comes as snow. The wind usually blows from the west, and it's possible to have winds of 5-10 mph (or more) for several days at a time with occasional gusts upwards of 25 mph. Summer temps can soar into the 90s during the day, but drop to the mid-50s at night.

Other Challenges

Early and late frost dates along with browsing wildlife can affect landscaping efforts. Glacier View can experience frost (and snow!) as early as mid-September and as late as Memorial Day or the first week of June. Deer, rabbits, and rodents (chipmunks, ground and tree squirrels, marmots) browse vegetation, especially new or just emerging plants. If deer are hungry enough, little escapes their attention. They may browse out of curiosity or eat plants in the fall that they didn't try in the spring. Also, a deer's taste can change from year-to-year. Repellants for deer, rabbits, and rodents are commercially available but because they may not be totally reliable, it's best to protect newly planted or re-emerging plants with some type of screening.

USDA Plant Hardiness Zones

Plant hardiness zones indicate which plants are likely to do well in specific geographical locations based on the average annual minimum winter temperature determined by elevation, latitude and proximity to the coast. Plants that have a cold hardiness rating of zone 3 or 4 stand the best chance of survival in GVM.

Xeriscape Design

Incorporating the principles of Xeriscape design, including the use of rock gardens, can complement surrounding forests, meadows, and woodlands (see handout on rock garden basics), and using gravel or stone paths can provide defensible space around your home's perimeter to help protect against wildfire.

Native vs Non-native Plants

Assess the characteristics of the site to be landscaped, including elevation, soil composition, terrain (meadow, forest, rock outcroppings, or other microenvironments), and amount of sun, shade, and wind throughout the day. Take note of the location of native plants on your property. Make plant selections carefully, keeping in mind a plant's unique growing requirements and where on your property the plant might be sited. When selecting plants, it's best to ask for a plant by its scientific name because common names vary.

Native plants that are adaptable to the GVM environment—elevation, terrain, soil, wind—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 and fall. 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.

Non-native Xeriscape plants that are adaptable to the GVM climate and terrain can also work with native plants to blend with the natural setting. Non-native plants may need to have the soil amended using a mixture of native soil and small amounts of peat moss and compost.

Planting and Maintenance

Plants with similar needs should be grouped in the same microenvironment (e.g., scree; sandy soil; well-drained soil; garden loam). It's important that new vegetation adapt to the natural soil conditions as quickly as possible. For trees and shrubs, it's recommended that a root stimulator be used at time of planting and added to the water before watering. This will help to promote root growth and reduce transplant shock. Be sure to deep water newly planted vegetation. Good drainage, especially for rock garden plants, is crucial for their survival. Use a mixture of equal parts loose soil (garden or topsoil, not potting soil) peat moss, and crushed gravel (for drainage). Top with a layer of pea gravel (3/8 inch).

All new vegetation needs infrequent deep soakings for the first year until it's established; thereafter, little, if any, water is required. Deadheading blooms at the end of the season along with regular pruning to remove dead canes can maintain plant health and promote growth.

(See GVM website for a comprehensive listing of native plants found in GVM. Also, see the Resources list in the information box for native plant websites and local nature centers or display gardens that feature Colorado native plants.)

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