

Evergreen Nature Center Garden Project

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Webmaster

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by Chris Pfaff

Visitors to the Evergreen Nature Center during the 2018 season may have noticed some changes to the planted area by the entryway. The garden is going native! Colorado plants that grow naturally in our Evergreen environment are replacing ones that do not occur here. There are multiple benefits to doing this. Natives are adapted to our soils and climate conditions and require less in the way of watering and fertilizers. They also attract and support native insects that are vital to our birds. With their variety of sizes, colors, and shapes, native plants add beauty to our surroundings and remind us of what makes our area distinctive from others.



Nature Center Garden volunteer Pat Carter

Beginning last April, I met with fellow Audubon members and plant enthusiasts Pat Carter and Else Van Erp to begin planning the garden. First we developed a list of potential native plants that would be suitable for the site. Then we surveyed the existing garden and identified lots of weeds (non-natives that take over) and other non-native flowering plants for removal. We also decided that the existing chokecherry shrubs, although native, were

encroaching into the area. With tools in hand we set to work. With the weeds gone and the chokecherries cut back, we were excited to uncover some unexpected natives including alumroot and stonecrop.

Following the clean-up, we discussed a general plan for the garden and how we would proceed. We decided to consider the first year an experiment to try a variety of native plants from the surrounding area to see what does well and what doesn't. We also determined that to enhance the garden initially, we wouldn't remove all the non-natives at once, but rather wait until native replacements had started to fill in. Because of the multi-tier layout of the garden, we chose to plant the smaller varieties, suitable for rock gardens, at eye level where people can get a good close-up view. Taller flowering plants and shrubs would be located in the upper tiers. Over time, we hope to add some native plants in the crevices of the rock retaining wall border.

Planting started the first of June, a warm sunny day. We added some compost to the soil and fish fertilizer to the transplants. By the end of the morning, the garden was beginning to take shape. Over the summer we continued adding plants, most donated from our own gardens/yards and some that were purchased. With hot weather, regular watering was necessary as was keeping up with the weeds. For the rock garden and to improve drainage on all levels, we collected and placed various size rocks. We also continued to do some more pruning of the chokecherries. As summer progressed, we were delighted that many plants seemed to take to their new location and start to grow and flower.

Along the way, we realized the garden is not without its challenges. Watering is definitely difficult because the only available source is the lake and there is no good access up the steep slope to the upper tiers. Drainage is not optimal resulting in some water flowing down the slope rather than being absorbed. We did some leveling with garden tools and added rocks in strategic locations to impede flows, but more work is needed. Lastly, local critters enjoyed munching on our fresh young plants. We're not sure who all the culprits are, but in September, on two occasions, it appeared that hungry elk managed to forage in the garden. We hope to address the challenges this spring to help ensure the success of the garden.

As the days get longer and turn toward spring, we'll be anxiously awaiting the first green sprouts to emerge in the garden in hopes that our efforts last year will grow and blossom!

Nature Center Garden Plant list

New Additions

- *Antennaria parviflora* (pussytoes)
- *Aquilegia coerulea* (Colorado columbine)
- *Aquilegia saximontana* (dwarf columbine)
- *Arctostaphylos uva* (kinninick)
- *Campanula rotundifolia* (common harebell)

- *Cerastium arvense* (mouse-ear chickweed)
- Cinquefoil (species?)
- *Erigeron compositus* (cutleaf daisy)
- *Eriogonum umbellatum* (sulphur flower)
- *Gaillardia aristata* (blanketflower)
- *Harbouria trachypleura* (whiskbroom parsley)?
- *Linum lewisii* (flax)
- *Monarda fistulosa* (Bee balm)
- *Oenothera caespitosa* (evening primrose)
- *Penstemon strictus* (Rocky Mountain penstemon)
- *Penstemon virens* (blue mist penstemon)
- *Penstemon whippleanus* (dusky penstemon)
- *Potentilla floribunda* (native potentilla)
- *Ratibida columnifera*, (prairie coneflower)
- *Rudbeckia hirta* (black-eyed Susan)
- *Rubus parviflorus* (thimbleberry)
- *Sisyrinchium montanum* (blue-eyed grass)

Existing Native Plants

- *Aquilegia coerulea* (Colorado columbine)
- *Achilles millefolium* (Yarrow) several
- *Artemisia frigida* (Silver sage) numerous
- *Aster porteri* (species?) (Porter's aster)
- *Grindelia* (Gumweed) several
- *Heuchera* (species?) (Alumroot)
- *Oreobatus deliciosus* (Boulder Raspberry)
- *Padus virginiana* (Chokecherry)
- *Sedum lanceollatum* (Yellow stonecrop)

December 30, 2018