

Fall 2020



The Gardens at Crail Ranch

In 2019, the Alliance built a demonstration garden at Crail Ranch using native plants that are wildlife friendly, water wise, and preserving of the historic landscape.

This is our garden's story one year later.



Inspire - Educate - Conserve

plant
choice
matters



Native plants are the foundation of the ecological food web. Research indicates that when a landscape dips below 80% native plants, the reproduction rate of birds begins to drop. Because animals directly or indirectly depend on plants for their food, the diversity of animals in a particular habitat is very closely linked to the diversity of the plants in that habitat.



#GrowWild

Once established, native plants are easy to maintain because they are adapted to Montana's temperatures, rainfall patterns, and soil conditions. But most importantly, native plants are the foundation for the food web and vital for sustaining ecosystems.



2019



29 volunteers put in 223 hours

Built 4 gardens

Planted 700 wildflowers / 25 species



2020



- 17 volunteers worked for 47 hours in the garden
- Built & placed 3 Aldo Leopold benches: 2 large benches made of yellow cedar & a kid's bench made from russian olive wood (an invasive tree species)
- Planted 115 more wildflowers & 12 more species
- Completed rock perimeter of native grass area
- Installed slate flower identification signs
- Constructed a noxious weed identification planter
- Hosted Montana Outdoor Science School Master Naturalists
- Held our inaugural Noxious Weed Bouquet Contest



Project Costs

(fall 2018 to fall 2020)

Build & Plant Materials	\$28,570
Events	\$495
Marketing & Promotions	\$1,880
Supplies	\$1,492
In-kind	\$24,755
Project Management	\$8,214
Total Expenses	\$65,406

Partners & Donors



Beth MacFawn Landscape Design,
Big Sky Community Organization,
Big Sky Landscaping, Big Sky Owners
Association, Big Sky Resort Tax, Big Sky
Water & Sewer, Cashman Nursery,
Gallatin Conservation District,
Gallatin River Task Force, Gallatin
Waterworks, Meadowview II LLC,
Historic Crail Ranch, Moonlight
Community Foundation, Rotary Club of
Big Sky, Steve & Rhonda Karl, Spanish
Peaks Community Foundation,
Westscape Nursery, Yellowstone Club
Community Foundation

Lessons learned



If something is not eating your plants, then your garden is not part of the ecosystem.

We have observed plants being consumed by multiple species, but one voracious herbivore seems to have had the biggest impact, our resident cottontail. Next year we will be prepared to protect young plants with wire cloches.

A global pandemic impacts most everything.

Budget cuts meant the Alliance lacked funding to adapt and transform our programming. Thus, we focused on ensuring garden construction and maintenance happened as planned. While most of our plans to host events at the garden had to be postponed until next year, we still welcomed Montana Outdoor Science School's Master Naturalist group and held our inaugural Noxious Weed Bouquet Contest.

The pandemic also impacted the ability to procure signage for the garden in a timely manner. With our interpretive sign now in hand, installation will occur this fall or early next spring (weather dependent). Garden donor signs are being produced by the same company that did our donor bench signs to ensure continuity and will be placed next spring.

Weeds like to grow!

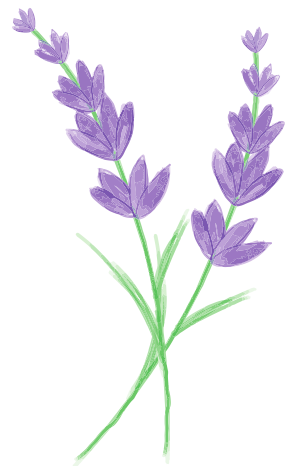
We worked to install native grasses in the "meadow" along the north and east side of Crail Ranch and were not surprised that weeds thrived in the newly added topsoil. Thus, seeding Idaho fescue was pushed back until fall to ensure weeds do not overtake native grasses.

Looking ahead to 2021!



We will be:

- adding a pollinator friendly garden clippings bin which will store plant materials on site to ensure beneficial insects are able to complete their life cycle
- building a shade structure to provide respite on hot, sunny days
- creating more informational signage and garden guides for visitors
- planting more wildflowers and adding additional species to the gardens
- holding our second annual noxious weed bouquet contest
- hosting educational events and workshops to...



inspire, educate, & conserve!