

HIGH ALTITUDE DEMONSTRATION GARDEN INTERNSHIP PARK COUNTY

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PROJECT INTRODUCTION

This project involved the design and implementation of a series of demonstration gardens in the mountain town of Bailey in Park County, Colorado. These gardens are designed to showcase region-appropriate layouts and plants, with an emphasis on native, waterwise selections. This project aims to educate residents and visitors with materials for applying suitable plant choices and care practices in their own gardens, contributing to native ecosystem preservation and enjoyment.

The garden area is divided into themed sections, including sensory, pollinator-friendly, xeriscape, alpine, and native plant gardens. Challenges associated with this project include the high elevation, soil conditions, and the demanding microclimates characteristic of Park County. This endeavor entailed collaboration with various stakeholders.

Figure 1. Garden Design Plan



INTERNSHIP GOALS

My goals in this project were to contribute positively to a community I have a personal connection with, gain insights into community development and project management, and delve into the intricate relationship between people and plants. I aimed to create meaningful impact, acquire valuable hands-on experience, and deepen my understanding of the dynamic interactions between people and their environment.

THE PROCESS

Given the challenging high-altitude mountain terrain, I researched and curated a suitable plant list with input from my mentors. Initial site preparation involved debris removal and thorough mowing. I then tilled the site using a rototiller to eliminate existing grass and aerate the soil.

In anticipation of Bailey Days, an annual local festival hosted on June 24-25, I engaged in outreach to businesses along Main Street. I distributed copies of the plans shown in Figure 1 for display in shops and booths. This was also a chance for me to answer questions about the plans. These plans were also exhibited on the community garden fence prior to the festival. In collaboration with the local Boy Scout troop, a small lending library was set up in the lot's southeast corner.

Construction commenced in early July with improved weather conditions. I marked the garden layout using spray paint and established level pathways. Raised berms were constructed for visual interest and depth, and locally-sourced river rock edging and boulders enhanced the gardens by mirroring the mountain landscape. A local landscaper was contracted for the installation of drip irrigation and sprinklers.

I applied a 2" layer of rock crusher fines to create durable, accessible pathways. This included a path to the flagpoles and veteran memorial already in the sensory garden area. The rest area in the southeast corner of the parking lot received the same treatment, with relocated picnic benches for public use.

By early August, a native grass blend sod was laid in the turf area, and a crevice/rock garden was constructed on the west side of the main building.

Figure 2. Construction Process Start-to-Finish



EDUCATIONAL APPLICATION

Engaging in a multidisciplinary demonstration garden aligns with my major in anthropology and interest in the relationships between people and plants. This project offered a hands-on exploration of how cultural values manifest through plant choices, while the rural context enriches my understanding of historical, ecological, and aesthetic dimensions in this relationship. This internship will help guide my approach to community-based projects and community development as a focus of my education and career in the future.

INSIGHTS & TAKEAWAYS

I gained valuable insights on project management and multidisciplinary collaboration. Delays due to unforeseen circumstances, such as the impact of thunderstorms on the tilling process, illuminated the need for contingency plans and adaptability. I recognized the importance of effective communication and the need to bridge different areas of expertise for a cohesive outcome.

While working independently throughout the project, I honed my problem-solving skills, decision-making abilities, and self-reliance. This experience underscored the value of personal initiative and responsibility in achieving project milestones.

Undertaking community outreach revealed both the importance and challenges associated with fostering community involvement, particularly in rural areas like Bailey where the community is small but widely dispersed. My efforts at engagement illuminated the significance of communication, collaboration, and adaptability in engaging diverse community members and values.

The project's location shed light on the unique requisites of mountain microecosystems, as I learned about the specific demands of mountain landscapes and channeled the diversity of Park County's ecosystems to create designs that would work in areas across the county.

NEXT STEPS

Finalizing the gardens will entail procuring, planting, and establishing the chosen plants within each garden section. Educational signage will be positioned along the pathways, which will offer information on each garden's layout and plants. This will enable visitors to gather inspiration and replicate the designs on their own properties.

A pathway will be established within the Bailey Community Garden, giving convenient access to the planter boxes. The installation of the Park County Plant Select Garden Monument at the front of 83 Main Street is also planned.