



CRAIL GARDENS

In 2019, Grow Wild 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 five years later.

Restoring biodiversity benefits everyone. Native plants, wildlife, and ecosystems are intimately connected.



Volunteers are the heart of our gardens. Together, we preserve the landscapes we cherish.



Sustainable landscaping takes effort, but the rewards are endless. This demonstration garden informs and inspires, and we're here to help.



Crail Garden Benefactors

Thank you to our Garden Benefactors! Your contributions are essential to maintaining and enhancing this unique community asset, fostering learning, inspiration, and enjoyment for all.





Our Garden's History

2018

Garden project was born!
Donated topsoil moved to site.

2019

29 volunteers · 223 hours · 692 native plants planted
Garden beds & paths were built, irrigation installed, plants planted, gardens mulched.



2020

17 volunteers · 47 hours · 115 native plants
Built & installed garden benches, completed rock garden edging, and installed signs & plant ID markers.



2021

32 volunteers · 105 hours · 130 native plants
Began hosting events, installed clippings bin, planted 2 native grass lawn areas, experimented with pea gravel mulch in north-most garden.



2022

48 volunteers · 116 hours · 156 native plants
Continued to restore native grass lawn area, replaced bark mulch with fire-wise pea gravel in west garden, built paths to the vegetable garden & spigot, hosted 11 events, including our inaugural Big Sky Wildflower Festival, with 192 people in attendance.



2023

33 volunteers · 93 hours · 105 native plants
Built a sedum garden (#5) on the south side of the main cabin, hosted 20 events with 493 people in attendance.



2024

31 volunteers · 72 hours · 345 native plants
Replaced bark mulch with pea gravel in the remaining 2 gardens, hosted 14 events with 215 people in attendance.





A FIREWISE LANDSCAPE

Crail Gardens serves as a demonstration garden for sustainable practices. Now, it aims to inspire the community to adopt firewise landscaping and improve defensible space.

When Crail Gardens was initially planned, pea gravel was chosen as the preferred mulch due to its durability and firewise properties. However, unexpected weather delays pushed planting into mid-July, during peak summer heat. The intense conditions began to stress the plants, and to ensure the survival of the newly planted wildflowers, we made the decision to pivot to a lighter, easier-to-apply shredded cedar mulch.

By 2021, we revisited the use of pea gravel, starting with an experimental swap in the smallest garden. Initially, we were concerned that the gravel's heat-retaining properties might increase the plants' water needs by raising soil temperatures. To our surprise and delight, the results showed the opposite: not only did the pea gravel conserve water, but it also created ideal conditions for the native wildflowers, particularly low-growing species, to thrive.

Encouraged by these findings, we expanded the use of pea gravel in 2022, replacing the mulch in the west garden. The positive effects on plant health were consistent, and we further applied this approach when constructing a new sedum garden south of the main cabin, which also utilized pea gravel to great success.

In 2024, with the help of dedicated volunteers and nearly the entire Big Sky Fire Department team, we completed the transition by replacing the mulch in the two largest gardens. This final step not only unified the aesthetic and ecological benefits across all our gardens but also ensured they adhered to firewise landscaping principles—a crucial consideration in the wildland-urban interface. By choosing fire-resistant pea gravel, we enhanced the gardens' resilience to wildfire risks, while continuing to support thriving native ecosystems.



2024'S MVG

MOST VALUABLE
GARDENER

Stan & Cyndee Button

2024

Crail Gardens



In 2019, we awarded our first Most Valuable Gardener (MVG) recognition to Sugar, a cornerstone of our community who played a vital role in building this garden. Year after year, Sugar remained a guiding presence, ensuring we stayed on the right path and upheld the garden's vision.

Sugar crossed the rainbow bridge last year, leaving behind an unparalleled legacy. Her work lives on through the dedication and spirit of two incredible individuals who have stepped forward to carry it forward.

Community gardens like this one not only honor the contributions of individuals like Sugar but also serve as spaces where people come together to grow, connect, and support one another. Through their efforts, these gardens become living tributes to those who have shaped them, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose that strengthens the entire community.



Crail Gardens is a Gathering Place

Our efforts starting in 2019...



190 Volunteers



656 Hours



1,543 Wildflowers



52 Species

Gardens bring the community together through events, fostering connection, education, and a shared commitment to sustainable practices.



51 Events



986 People

Thank you to our volunteers, benefactors, partners, and visitors for making Crail Gardens such a valuable community asset.

