

Demonstration Garden of California Native Plants Along the Mariposa Creek Parkway

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Progress Report: July 1, 2001 to June 30, 2002

Introduction:

Many people move to the foothills from the bay area and southern California to build their dream homes and retire. They bring with them horticultural practices that are often unsuited to this area. The Master Gardeners, in cooperation with the Fire Safe Council and the regional California Native Plant Society, have for many years been attempting to educate people (particularly newcomers) about the desirability of using California native plants in home landscaping. When the County announced they had received state and federal funding for construction of the Mariposa Creek Parkway, which had been on the drawing board for nearly ten years, an opportunity arose. The Master Gardeners would be able to provide the community with a demonstration garden of California Native Plants suitable for home landscaping as well as beautifying an area within easy walking distance of the main street.

Objectives:

The University of California Master Gardeners of Mariposa County, under the direction of the U.C. Cooperative Extension Horticulture Advisor, developed the following goals:

1. Provide home gardeners with examples of native ornamentals for use in landscaping that are fire resistive, drought tolerant, and attractive to birds and butterflies.
2. Provide students of ornamental horticulture an opportunity to study the growth habits, beauty, and environmental value of California Nativescaping.
3. Provide the public with an attractive place to walk while learning about the native plants of the Sierra Nevada foothills.

Discussion:

The first step in the project was to develop a comprehensive list of suitable plants. A committee was formed which included Master Gardeners, California Native Plant Society members, and other knowledgeable community representatives. When this list was complete, a garden design contest was announced, and the community was encouraged to submit a design for the new garden. A Mariposa County High School horticulture student who managed to capture just the right "feel" for the Parkway won the contest, judged and unanimously decided by a panel of designers, artists, and native plant experts.

The next step was to transfer the design to a blueprint and begin soil preparation and planting. Due to construction delays by the County, actual planting was not started until March 2002. We were able to locate native topsoil and dig out the backfill. In April we planted about 350 plants, including over 35 varieties of California natives and hybrids suitable for our foothill area. In May, we installed drip irrigation, attaching it to the underground water pipes provided by the County. In June, the Heartland Opportunity Center for developmentally disabled young adults spread mulch over the entire area.

Although the project is not complete, we have made good progress and the appreciation expressed by the community has been overwhelming. Plant identification labels are made and will be installed in July. Two permanent signs made from native slate have been commissioned and should be finished soon. About twenty more varieties of native plants have been ordered for fall planting.

The Master Gardeners and other willing volunteers have done the work. All plants were ordered through local nurseries, not only to help the local economy, but also to encourage them to stock these plants in the future. The grand opening celebration is scheduled for Spring, 2003.

Mariposa Creek Parkway – California Native Plant Demonstration Garden

