

New Native Plant Display Garden at ZooMontana

by Sandy King

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Flora of Montana – Rimrocks to River, a new display garden at ZooMontana, showcases the beauty, diversity, and utility of native plants in the region around Billings, Montana. This project was initiated in the spring of 2003 by members of the Artemisia Chapter in conjunction with ZooMontana and has received contributions from several benefactors. In November 2003, the Artemisia Chapter received \$1000 in funding from MNPS to help with construction costs.

This year's work concentrated on garden design, site renovation, hardscaping, and the development of the "Rimrock" section of the garden. In early spring, huge sandstone rocks donated to ZooMontana were positioned into place—transforming a neglected slope into an eye-catching rimrock hillside. In late spring, a wide sandstone-colored, leaf-imprinted, concrete pathway was installed throughout the garden. It is beautiful as well as wheel chair accessible. Instantly, visitors started walking through the display, something rarely done before. Throughout the year, Artemisia Chapter members, ZooMontana staff, and other volunteers salvaged and transplanted over 100 plants into the garden. Sections have been tentatively prepared for: Rimrock Plants, Shrubs of the Sagebrush, Prairie Grasses, Prairie Forbs, Aquatic and Riparian Plants, Currants and other Fruit Bearing Plants, and Short-lived, Short-Stature, and Seedling Plants.

The majority of MNPS project funding helped to provide hoses and hook-ups for watering through the summer, plant labels, and installation in the fall of a permanent drip irrigation system throughout the garden. Plans for 2005 include the installation of a flipbook-style information station and placards acknowledging contributors; plant salvaging, planting, and labeling; and general maintenance. There's still a lot of satisfying work yet to be done so please call Sandy King at 652-8468 if you can give us a hand.