

A National Garden Clubs/ Principal Financial Group Project

The loss of the Columbia Gardens in 1973 was Butte, Montana's saddest day. The 21 acre floral and amusement park was purchased by mining magnate William A. Clark in 1899 partly to endear him to the voting public in his U.S. Senate bid. Of all the grand floral displays in this Victorian park, the one most remembered was the Butterfly. With a \$2,000 grant from the Principal Financial Group and a match of \$3,000 together from the Butte-Silver Bow Government and BP-ARCO, the 30 by 40 foot Butterfly was reproduced for the city in the historic district in a park with historic artifacts and interpretive signage that is surrounded by landscape gardening.

Originally the Butterfly was planted with 7,000 to 9,000 pansies every year. However, because it is cost prohibitive to again use pansies for the Butterfly, foliage plants instead will be used to create butterfly wing detail that was almost impossible to achieve with pansies alone. In 2004 heritage lettuces in yellow, red, and maroon along with metallic maroon leafed beets formed the Butterfly. Next year silver-blue blooming perennial foliage plants will be added. Over the growing season because next year's foliage plants will bloom, the Butterfly will change color during the summer. Furthermore, the generic shape of the Columbia Gardens Butterfly will be changed to our State butterfly, the Mourning Cloak ... a legislative accomplishment facilitated by the Montana Federation of Garden Clubs.

The following are the four lettuces and beet selection that were used for the Butterfly. Most of these vegetables are heirloom plants. All can be purchased through the Seed Savers Exchange, 3076 N. Winn Rd.; Decorah, Iowa 52101; (563) 382-5990, or at www.seedsavers.org. Though you may not be making a butterfly, these plants are excellent in Montana as foliage plants in any ornamental garden or potager (decorative vegetable garden).



Rossimo lettuce



Mascara lettuce



Red Velvet and Australian
Yellowleaf Lettuce



McGregor's Favorite Beet



The completed "butterfly" at Columbia Gardens, 2004.