

Alamosa Trees: Not Just a Pretty Landscape Feature
by Marilyn Loser
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Trees are not only beautiful to behold, they also reduce noise and wind, save energy, improve our air, reduce global warming and improve economic sustainability. Alamosa is an *Oasis in the High Dessert* and every tree counts.

Have you ever noticed on a windy Alamosa spring or summer day that areas of town with more trees are less windy, cooler in summer, and quieter?

Less obvious, but extremely important, is the ability of trees to absorb carbon dioxide spewed out by an industrial lifestyle that can harm people and animals. Leaves take in carbon dioxide and other air pollutants such as ozone, carbon monoxide, and sulfur dioxide, process them for tree development and growth, and give off oxygen. If every American family planted just one tree, the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere would be reduced by one billion pounds annually according to the American Forestry Association. This is almost 5% of the amount that human activity pumps into the atmosphere each year.

Economic benefits of trees are usually associated with energy savings. Heating costs can be reduced if a house has a wind break placed in the path of prevailing winds – typically southwest in the San Luis Valley – that doesn't shade the home. Buildings stay cooler in summer if deciduous trees (those that drop their leaves in fall) are planted on the south and southwest sides of the house. Street trees, those planted between the sidewalk and street, and most visible in the older areas of Alamosa and Monte Vista, reflect heat and reduce temperatures on streets. An additional benefit is that landscaped homes are more valuable than non-landscaped homes.

Societal benefits are harder to quantify, but that doesn't mean they aren't important. For example, hospital patients who have a view of trees out of their window recovered more quickly than patients who did not. Similarly, employees who could look out their office windows and see trees and nature were happier at work. If you wish, please email me for references at marilyn@alamosatrees.net.

Unlike the Eastern United States, where much of the land surrounding communities is naturally forested, naturally occurring trees in the San Luis Valley are mostly limited to the Rio Grande Bosque. We're more dependent on locally planted trees in our communities than are Easterners.

Trees are major capital assets that require care and maintenance. Many of the cottonwood and elm trees in Cole Park and downtown Alamosa residential areas are becoming very old and will need to be replaced with a diversity of tree species if we wish to have a healthy community forest.

Perhaps surprisingly, the biggest cost of trees and shrubs occurs when they are purchased and planted. A tree properly chosen and planted will require less maintenance than one haphazardly planted with little thought to its function and future.

Arborists have learned a lot about trees in the last few years. For example, many people believe trees develop deep roots. In fact, less than 3% of tree species have tap roots – and even these trees have extensive lateral root systems. Most tree roots are in the top two feet of soil.

The goal of the Alamosa Trees column is to provide information regarding trees specifically related to the San Luis Valley. The Alamosa Tree Board has designated the week of May 3 – May 9 as Arbor Week; the next installment of this column will list planned activities. The *AlamosaTrees.net* website has a list of trees recommended by the Alamosa Tree Board as well as information on planting and caring for trees.

“The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The next best time is now.” From the website, *treesaregood.com*.

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