

2009 10 28 Alamosa Trees
by Marilyn Loser
150 Mature Park Trees – What’s the Future? Part 2

Part 1 of this article discussed a need to plant new trees in Alamosa parks to begin replacing older trees nearing the end of their life spans.

Municipal arborists suggest that the ideal distribution of trees by size should be 40% young trees (up to 6 in. diameter at breast height), 25% maturing trees (6-12 in.), 25% mature trees (12-24 in.) and 10% old trees (greater than 24 in.). The City of Boulder’s mix is very close to this. Alamosa, on the other hand, is way out of proportion. Only 22% of our trees are young, 15% are maturing, 15% are mature, and a whopping 48% are old.

We desperately need to plant young trees to insure that future generations may enjoy our parks.

So what should we plant? I feel I’m already hearing a chorus of shouts, “Plant native trees!” Unfortunately, that won’t work in Alamosa. As pointed out in the previous part of this article, 2 of the 3 dominant species in Cole Park are cottonwoods and willows, are native to the San Luis Valley. Where did these native trees live originally? In the bosque. They are short-lived, have brittle branches and love lots of water.

If you don’t believe me, just drive a few miles out of town in any direction away from the Rio Grande--you won’t see many trees growing on their own. Perhaps you’ll spy a few Russian Olives as you drive south. They aren’t native, are on the Colorado nuisance list and are banned from sale. For more information check out the “Trees to Avoid” Tree List at AlamosaTrees.net. (By the way, I frequently promote this website and want you to know it is NOT a commercial site. No ads anywhere – nothing to buy! I created it, along with its sister site, AlamosaFlowers.net, as an informational site to help gardeners in our unique location and climate.)

Part 1 of this article noted that the Institute for Environmental Solutions in Denver suggested planting Kentucky Coffeetrees and Green Ashes since they excel at all four environmental criteria (air quality, carbon storage and sequestration, energy conservation, and water conservation). I also asked if anyone knew of a local Kentucky Coffeetree; I haven’t had any responses. I have, however, had several people ask me about these trees because they are very curious.

Several tree species recommend by the IESD meet 3 out of 4 criteria and are probably appropriate for Alamosa. We have 3 young Bur Oaks (2 in Carroll and 1 in Zapata) and 3 Oakleaf Mountain Ashes (East side of Boyd). On private property I’ve seen quite a few Honeylocusts (703 Main – delicate feathery leaflets), some Hawthorn cultivars (in the new drainage area near the intersection of Hwy 160 and Hwy 285), a small-leafed Linden (915 4th St.), and a Common Hackberry (507 Pikes Peak – my backyard). I’ve heard there’s a large Horse Chestnut in La Jara, but I haven’t found it.

Other places in Colorado are diversifying their tree species. Recently, the small town of Holly (pop. about 1000 on the eastern plains) planted 3 Bur Oaks, 3 Honey Locusts, and 3 American Elm Hybrids, which are Dutch elm disease resistant.

I would include American Elm Hybrids such as the Horizon Elm (Jardin Hermosa playground) in the Alamosa Park Tree Palette. I would also add some crabapples. I can feel the shudders of those of you who have to sweep up those pesky apples or have slipped on a sidewalk covered with mashed fruit. New cultivars such as Spring Snow (3 in Boyd and 3 in Zapata) have beautiful white flowers and are fruitless. Unfortunately, I don't know of any pink flowered, fruitless varieties.

It may seem crazy to be thinking about planting trees as the first snow flies and most deciduous trees have dropped their leaves. We're entering into "dream time" – the time of the year to dream about parks, yards, and gardens as the soil freezes and plants become dormant. It's a good time to think about new plantings and to contact garden centers, greenhouses and nurseries to see what can be ordered for spring.

The Alamosa Tree Board and the Department of Parks and Recreation are applying for a grant that would provide for planting several different tree species in Cole Park next summer. If funded, the grant will provide trees with identifying plaques so we can all know what we are seeing as we watch them grow.

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"Keep a green tree in your heart and perhaps a singing bird will come." - Chinese proverb