



A Good Tree for Your Yard

by Marilyn Loser

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Planning on a new tree for your yard? There are quite a few trees that work well in Alamosa; you're not limited to messy Siberian Elms. This article will discuss trees and shrubs suggested by Colorado Forester Vince Urbina during a recent Alamosa workshop and some of my favorites.

Urbina pointed out that people want the "perfect tree". Attributes include: fast growing, long lived, beautiful fragrant flowers over an extended time, no pests, no messy fruit, drought tolerant, and little to low maintenance requirements. Sound too good to be true? Sadly, it is.

Further, trees that grow fast, die fast, according to Urbina. He mentioned ads for trees, such as Thuja Green Giants, that grow 6-7 feet yearly. That is, for the first few years. After that they die off.

If you want a large, fairly fast growing tree, and have plenty of water, consider a Lanceleaf Cottonwood. It doesn't sucker. Don't mistake it for the Narrowleaf Cottonwood that suckers relentlessly. I know this from personal experience. Several Lanceleaf Cottonwoods recently were planted at the Alamosa Cemetery.

"Sensation Boxelder has good, small red foliage and doesn't attract bugs," said Urbina. He highly recommends this seedless male clone that was created by an Idaho plantsman to provide a stronger branching structure and more mannerly growth habit than other boxelders. Downtown Alamosa has a number of older boxelders, but I don't think they are Sensations.

Three other trees Urbina recommended are the ornamental Chinese Pear (*pyrus ussuriensis*), Russian Hawthorn (*crataegus ambigua* "Cockspur"), and columnar Swedish Aspen (*populus tremula* 'Erecta'). There are young specimens of all three in Alamosa and those I know of are doing well.

Chinese Pear and Russian Hawthorn are small-size trees. The pear at the corner of Edison and Main by Caton's had beautiful flowers this spring. Boy Scouts from Troop 307 planted it during Arbor Week 2009. Russian Hawthorns work well at high altitudes, and have only the occasional thorn. The Swedish Aspen is a close relative of the Lombardy Poplar, has a non-invasive root system (unlike Quaking Aspen), and works well in narrow spaces.

Urbina suggested three shrubs for the San Luis Valley – native Gambel Oak (*quercus gambelii*), Saskatoon Serviceberry (*amelanchier alnifolia*), and Silver Buffalo Berry (*shepherdia argentea*). I have specimens of all three in my yard and love them.

One Gambel Oak is about 8 feet tall and produced a few acorns last year. I love the typical lobed oak leaves. It's reputed to grow up to 9,000 feet in elevation, but I believe I've seen it higher up at the top of La Veta Pass.

Saskatoon Serviceberry has been a favorite of mine since I first saw great hedges of them in Saskatchewan, Canada. Alas, mine aren't so grand, but I love the white flowers and the birds love the berries.

Buffalo Berry is a Colorado native. It resembles its relative Russian Olive and is often suggested as a replacement plant for this banned (can't be sold in Colorado), invasive species. Buffalo Berries are dioecious (meaning there are both male and female plants) and females produce berries loved by birds. It has thorns, but tolerates drought, cold and alkaline conditions once established.

Favorites of mine include ashes. One of my main shade trees is a green ash (*fraxinum pennsylvanica*) and I'm thinking of planting an Autumn Purple Ash (*fraxinus americana*). I've been watching the purple ashes on the eastern side of Walgreens and they've been doing well. I planted an Oakleaf Ash (*sorbus thuringiaca*) last year and it has beautiful white blooms right now. I first noticed the species on the east side of Boyd Park. Sadly, those trees aren't doing very well, but I think it's because they need maintenance. They're planted in dirt and need wider and deeper watering basins and mulch.

As I've mentioned in previous articles, I like Canada Chokecherry (*prunus virginiana* 'Shubert') trees and all kinds of crabapples (*malus* various). Chokecherry trees (not our native shrubs) have white flowers and the new green leaves start turning purple after the blooms fade. As Alamosans know, crabapples do very well here and this spring the bloom was the best I've ever seen. The only one that doesn't produce fruit is the white blooming Spring Snow Crab.

Another small variety is the Tatarian Maple (*acer tataricum* "Hot Wings"). It is a patented variety developed in Colorado. Two are planted on the north side of Main Street – they have typical maple

Need more ideas? Take a walk around Cole Park. Many of the newer trees have identification tags (as will the newly planted trees along 6th Street and in the cemetery). Talk to a local tree vendor or visit the trees lists at AlamosaTrees.net.

"Trees are your best antiques." Alexander Smith