



Upcoming Tree Events & Trees in the South

by Marilyn Loser

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Alamosa Arbor Week will be April 14-30 this year. We'll be planting trees under power lines in two Alamosa Parks: Diamond and Boyd. There's a good chance we'll also plant trees in Carroll Park. Please come help us! Stay tuned for planting times – we'll firm up the times and dates this week. In the next few days, please check the AlamosaTrees.net website or the Courier for more information.

In addition, on April 20, from 9 am to 4 pm, Vince Urbina, Colorado State Forester, will present a tree pruning workshop. Vince will cover basic pruning topics and as well as address recent modifications to the Alamosa hazardous trees and shrubs ordinance pertaining to overhanging foliage (*See footnote). Learn the proper way to prune; please don't just hack away! As a frequent Alamosa walker and tree and shrub branch dodger, I'm hoping citizens will take care of their overhanging foliage.

Vince is extremely knowledgeable and an excellent presenter. My favorite part of his workshops is the hands-on demonstrations. Space is limited so please call the Alamosa Colorado State Forest office at 719-587-0915 for more information and reservations.

I had the good fortune to take a road trip through the southeastern United States with my husband earlier this year. I was amazed at the height and number of Loblolly Pines (*Pinus taeda*) starting in eastern Texas. According to the US National Forest Service (USNFS) website, it is dominant on about 20 million acres (about one-third the size of Colorado) in SE US, and grows in 14 states. They grow up to 115 ft. high. I got a crick in my neck looking up at them mile after mile as we drove along. They have lovely long needles and big cones that remind me of our Ponderosas. I estimate the Ponderosa on Main St in the Safeway block is about 50 ft. high and one of the tallest in Alamosa.

So why can't we grow them here and why are our trees shorter? The USNFS website states, "The climate over most of the Loblolly Pine range is humid, warm-temperate with long, hot summers and mild winters. Average annual rainfall varies from 40 to 60 in." Very different from Alamosa! We have a very short growing season with cold winters and only 6-8 inches of moisture per year. Trees just can't grow as much each year here.

I truly love the magnificent oaks in the south. Many we saw were the normally 'evergreen' Southern Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*). According to Wikipedia, they retain their leaves nearly year-round, but drop them immediately before new leaves emerge in spring so are not truly evergreen. Most that we saw were green. And many had bright green flourishes of Resurrection Fern (*Polypodium polypodioides* 'Watt') along their trunks and branches. During dry spells, the fern appears dry and shriveled. However, following a rain, it's green and lush. It's Louisiana's only epiphytic fern (a plant that grows harmlessly upon another plant and derives its moisture and nutrients from the air and rain), according to the New Orleans City Park website.

Definitely not as tall as the Loblolly Pines, the oaks can typically attain a height of 60 feet and a spread of 80 feet. I find it hard to image how those huge, long branches stay attached. The Wikipedia website shows a specimen with a height of 63 ft. and a spread of 141 feet! Sadly, they need to be in USDA zone 6-7 and we're just too cold in zone 3-4. We're hoping other oak species such as Bur Oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) will grow in Alamosa. They're slow growing, but long lived.

Wonderful white, Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*) trees were in full bloom and graced the byways as we ambled home. Alamosa's climate supports dogwood shrubs. I have a couple of Bailey Red Twig Dogwood (*Cornus sericea 'Baileyi'*) that I love. Mine are about three-feet high but I've seen larger specimens around town.

I loved traveling, but I love being home, even with our challenging growing climate!

* Hazardous trees & shrubs ordinance (Sec. 14-55) excerpt -- It is hereby declared a nuisance for an owner or occupant of private property to allow any branches of trees, shrubs, bushes or any other plant material growing on such property to: 1. Overhang streets or alleys in such a manner that the branches interfere with the safe and unobstructed movement of vehicles on any street or alley, or overhang the first fourteen (14) feet of space above any street or alley; 2. Encroach upon any public sidewalk or overhang the first eight (8) feet of space above any public sidewalk.

"There is always music amongst the trees in the Garden, but our hearts must be very quiet to hear it."
Minnie Aumonier