



Alamosa Landscapes

Autumn - A Landscape Mosaic

by Marilyn Loser

2018 September 26

"Winter is an etching, spring a watercolor, summer an oil painting and autumn a mosaic of them all." Stanley Horowitz

Usually, I place the quote at the end. However, to set the context for this week's column, I think the top makes more sense.

My garden is definitely past the summer oil-painting stage, but there are a few remaining spots of vibrant color. Petunias, nasturtiums, and geraniums are in full bloom in various barrels and pots around the yard. These flowers do particularly well from late May until the first really hard freeze if elevated off the ground a foot or so. I bring the geraniums in for the winter. We haven't had a hard freeze yet this season, but my records for hard frost dates over the last few years it happens during the last week or two of September. Even last year we had lows of 25 and 24 on Sept 25th and 26th.

Showy mums that I planted last fall are ablaze in flower beds now. Sometimes mums make it over the winter and sometimes not. I think the warm weather last winter helped with this and small 4-inch plants have turned into 12-inch plants this season

Yellow is the most predominant showy color right now in our yard. Tall Maximilian sunflower (*Helianthus maximiliani*) and yellow tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare* – note that this flower is now on the Colorado noxious weed list B and should not be spread) brighten the slight hill in our south garden. Cottonwood and ash trees are turning yellow. Gloriosa daisies (*Rudbeckia hirta*) still grace the front walkway as they've done since mid-July. Around town I've seen lots of yellow native cinquefoil (*Potentilla*) and chamisa (*Chrysothamnus nauseosus*) in bloom.

Annual, crazy orange-yellow California poppies (*Eschscholzia californica*) and red-yellow blanket flowers (*Gaillardia*) bloom longer than any other flower in my garden. It's not that one plant blooms all season, but these both reseed themselves and various specimens bloom from June until freezing. In my casual garden, I let them bloom where they pop up (unless they encroach on something I have less of and like more!).

In autumn, the quantity of blooms is much less than in summer and there is more green foliage on display. For some flowers you have to look for a blossom, much as I hunt for them in the spring. I often get a late showing of columbines, but none so far this year.

To me spring and watercolors bring to mind softer and lighter colors. And in Alamosa there is still a lot of brown and just a few colorful blooms poking up in spring. I don't have any light spring green color right now. However, I do have lots of brown seed heads ready to be gathered. Also, spring & early summer flowers such as penstemon and May night sage are re-blooming after being deadheaded earlier. Not as many blooms, but some. Tall fall asters are near the end of their bloom time and have the same colors as low, spring asters. Purple corn flowers or knapweed (*Centaurea hypoleuca*) are making a return showing.

Etchings make me think of contrast and texture. As the sun sets behind a few trees that have shed their leaves I think of the winter landscape. Fall just arrived so there's still time for the etching effect. I still remember my first fall in Alamosa – 1983. It snowed Halloween weekend and we had snow until May. There were a lot of dark tree silhouettes against white snow and grey skies. I certainly hope we have some good fall precipitation this year!

FREE TREES: If you become a member of the Arbor Day Foundation during September by giving \$10 or more you can get 10 free small tree saplings that should grow where you live or you can have the organization plant 10 trees in your honor in a National Forest in need. Visit arborday.org/September for more information.