



Alamosa Landscapes

Thinking of Seeds

by Marilyn Loser

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Now that the holidays are over, my mail box is filling up with seed and plant catalogs. I have perused them, but what I'm really excited about is attending the fourth annual "Seed to Seed Community Seed Exchange." Save the date: Saturday, January 26, 2 – 4 pm., first floor of the Nielsen Library on the Adams State University campus. Details will be coming out soon – check the ASU website. The focus of the seed exchange is to share non-hybrid and non-GMO seeds that were valley-grown and harvested. What a great idea!

In addition to finding new plants to try it's a great way to meet and/or catch up with fellow gardeners in the valley. I was away last year and didn't get to attend. While I take flower seeds, others take vegetable seeds. The flower seeds I will have this year include: Shirley poppies (*Papaver rhoeas*), fall asters (not wild -- *Aster* ?), Hollyhocks (*Alcea rosea*), and Gloriosa Daisies (*Rudbeckia hirta*). These all reseed very well. I will also have a couple that don't reseed as readily: columbine (*Aquilegia* species) and annual purple larkspur (*Consolida regalis*). I have some seeds from orange Oriental poppy (*Papaver oriental*) but don't know how well they will germinate. I've never collected them before.

In the past few years, I haven't planted as many seeds as I've focused on perennials and shrubs. I'm encouraged by the snow in my yard right now and hope this will be a better spring for flower seeds than last year when it was very arid. Last year we had only .8 inches of precipitation by the end May. I tend to plant annual seeds, especially those that reseed as I like a cottage garden and am happy when flowers find their own spots.

Most seeds need to have sufficient moisture to germinate. Since I didn't plant many the last few years, I have a backlog of purchased seeds that I plan to start planting when I see the ground again.

I've found that annual wildflower seeds will find their own time to germinate dependent on light, moisture, and temperature. So I rake the weed-free garden bed, strew the seeds, and lightly cover by raking. I then walk around to firm the soil hoping to keep the seeds from flying across town in our spring winds. Once temperatures warm up in April or May I try to keep the ground moist.

There are a few annual favorites that haven't reseeded in my garden. I will re sow: Chinese forget-me-nots (*Cynoglossum amabilis*), evening primrose (*Oenothera lamarckiana*), and California bluebell (*Phacelia campanularia*).

I don't often plant seeds for perennials finding I do better with purchased perennial plants. A large part of the reason is our short growing season. Many perennials have a hard time getting firmly established if

planted in the outdoor soil here – and many don't bloom until the second year. If they don't have enough root mass to survive the winter following germination, they just die off.

In the past, I have had good luck with Missouri primrose (*Oenothera macrocarpa*) doing some reseeding and found I have more seed. I will plant them and anticipate that a few may actually bloom during the first season.

I lost my orange butterfly weed plants (*Asclepias tuberosa*) that I had for many years and haven't seen plants for sale so will sow some seeds this year and try to monitor where I plant them. I've also lost a lot of orange and yellow Icelandic poppies (*Papaver nudicaule*) that used to reseed profusely. I will reseed this year – I miss them. They are a perennial and they do self sow. I think with a number of years of low moisture they just didn't make it.

I brought a few seed packets in from my cool, dark storage location so I could report the correct names. Now I have little seeds gracing my desktop. It is so easy to dream while it's cold and the ground is snow covered. I look forward to actually being in the garden sowing within the next couple of months even if it means moving some snow around!

Hope to see you at the seed exchange.

“Gardeners, I think, dream bigger than emperors.” Mary Cantwell (journalist)