



Alamosa Landscapes

Help Plant Trees; Care for Spring Bulbs after Bloom

by Marilyn Loser

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Arbor Week in Alamosa continues. Today at noon we'll plant more trees along the entry to the Alamosa Cemetery to complete the welcoming rows of evergreens.

Saturday, May 18, 10 a.m., we'll plant trees at the Alamosa Community Recreation Center Pavilion to provide a windbreak and shade for the new parking lot. This event was postponed from last Saturday as the trees didn't arrive in time. I can't say I'm unhappy with the change as the weather should be much better this week and the circus won't have vehicles parked we want to plant! I went out Saturday morning in case anyone who didn't get the postpone message showed up. What a surprise to see circus activity! And happily, no one showed up with shovel in hand.

Our grape hyacinths (*Muscari*), tulips (*Tulipa*), and many daffodils (*Narcissus sp*) are still beautifully blooming. Crocus (*Crocus*), hyacinths (*Hyacinth*), early daffodils and jonquils (*Narcissus sp*) are done blooming. So how should you care for your bulbs after bloom time?

Leave the leaves as long as they are green. Green leaves provide the plant energy to refresh the bulb and create next year's blooms. Some gardeners don't like the messy look as leaves start to yellow and fall over. I learned from my sister-in-law to loosely braid the leaves and tie them with one of the leaves. They don't look bad, especially if other plants, such a columbine, grow up around them.

Should you remove spent blooms and seedpods? It depends. I remove spent blooms as I find them unattractive and it doesn't prolong the bloom. Bulbs bloom once in a season unlike many perennials prolong their bloom time if dead blossoms are trimmed (deadheading). As far as seed pods, most folks prefer to divide clumps of bulbs rather than trying to grow them from seed. This is especially true of hybrid flowering bulbs – the seeds may not produce blooms like the ones on your current bulbs.

When should you fertilize? www.Davesgarden.com website says to fertilize on the soil surface in the fall. Or, if you're moving bulbs in spring or summer, they suggest adding "a gentle fertilizer or compost to the planting hole."

After bloom is a good time to divide bulb clumps. Only replant some of the largest, healthiest looking bulbs in the original hole. Sort through the rest and pick the best to replant elsewhere. I find I can tell when it's time to divide tulip and iris bulbs if a clump produces lots of foliage and few blooms.

Will the flower bed be naked after the bulb leaves die back? It depends on the bulb. The bulbs for larger flowers such as tulips and daffodils are usually planted about eight inches down. This leaves room above them for planting annuals. I find that columbines pop up all around my yard and often do well mixed in with tulips. I didn't plant them there, they just moved in! Stricter gardeners often intersperse clumps of perennials between clumps of bulbs.

I didn't necessarily plant smaller bulbs like grape hyacinths around the edges of flower beds, but that's where they thrive. I find if I plant summer annuals such as petunias (*Petunia*) and verbena (*Verbena*) next to them, the annuals' foliage and blossoms spread out and cover the spots where the bulbs lie underneath.

Irises (*Iris*) need to be near the surface so you can't plant other flowers on top of them. I try to surround them with perennials that bloom later in the season such as fall asters (*Aster*), mums (*Chrysanthemum*), Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*), stiff goldenrod (*Solidago rigida*), Shasta daisies (*Chrysanthemum maximum*), and black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia hirta*).

I try to include the scientific name when I refer to a plant as common names are sometimes used in different parts of the country for different plants -- I try to be specific. However, I noticed as I was writing this column that many of the common names are the same as the scientific ones. Please bear with me!

I counted 29 things blooming in our yard on Mother's Day. Even if I see only one bloom, such as I did on snow-in-summer, I count it! I think crabapples in our part of town are blooming a bit late and lilacs earlier. Take a look at what's blooming on the www.AlamosFlowers.net website.

Happy gardening – this the season!

“And then my heart with pleasure fills and dances with daffodils.” William Wordsworth