



Alamosa Landscapes

What's Happening in the Garden?

by Marilyn Loser

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Last year at this time I complained about the drought's negative impact on Alamosa gardening. The state of the garden is much better this year! At the end of May 2018 we only had .8 inch of precipitation. A big storm put down more than ½ inch on the 3rd. This year we've had 4.84 inches to date, more twice our average precipitation of 2.37 inches.

My perennials love it! Due to cooler than normal spring temperatures and lots of wind, many are blooming later than usual. Orange and yellow Icelandic poppies (*Papaver nudicaule*) dot the yard and California poppies (*Eschscholzia californica*) are just coming out. CA poppies are an annual and reseed prolifically and I let them grow where they want unless they start taking over paths and then I pull them. I do find it odd that they are easy to germinate, but they don't transplant well! My red Oriental poppy (*Papaver oriental*) buds are just starting to show some color; most years they start blooming by the first of June.

Native favorites that are coming into bloom include many colors of columbine (*Aquilegia species*) and purple penstemon (*Penstemon strictus*). I have a wide range of columbine color combinations. I didn't buy any new ones for many years so the ones I had interbred. I did purchase a few blue ones (our state flower) last year and they have the lovely deep purple and white colors. My columbines mostly propagate by seeds. My penstemon mostly spread by runners; they don't pop up in new places in the yard. Both are easy to control.

Low growing plants that have been doing well include lavender and pink creeping phlox (*Phlox stolonifera*) – they've been blooming since the first of April. Creeping thyme (*Thymus*) and Veronica (*Veronica oltensis*) grow in between flagstones in our garden. Due to all the moisture they've been blooming well since early May. I do irrigate them over the summer.

May night and meadow sage (*Salvia species*), white meadow anemone (*Anemone Canadensis*), iris (*Iridaceae*), red and pink yarrow (*Achillea species*), magenta perennial cornflower (or knapweed - *Centaurea hypoleuca*), creeping yellow buttercups (*Ranunculus plentiflorus*), and chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*), are all blooming profusely.

The sages, anemone, and yarrow are all pretty well behaved and spread nicely, but don't take over. The cornflowers do reseed around the yard and I have to keep an eye on them. The buttercups spread really quickly and have tenacious roots so I do pull a lot every year, but love them because they'll grow where other perennials won't. Chives would like to take over and I can only use so many in cooking. I do pull a

lot out, but they're easy to pull. They wouldn't spread as much if I cut off the blossoms, but I love them!

Lilacs (*Syringa vulgaris*) seemed to bloom early this year and are mostly done. 'Arnolds Red' is a bush honey suckle with bright green leaves and early red blooms. I've fallen in love with them in recent years and have three of them now. They started blooming the first week of May and still have some red blossoms. Being an early bloomer, they give me hope that spring will come during cold, windy May days.

White spirea (*Spiraea nipponica* 'Snowmound') shrubs started blooming the last week of May. Those in the most protected and sunny areas are in full bloom while others are just starting to come out.

Wild red roses (*Rosa* ?) that we got from a friend's garden years ago are blooming profusely this year. Our wild yellow rose (which may be a Harrison – *Rosa* ?) is just coming out. These bush roses are very hardy and have never failed to bloom. Our oldest one is in a protected part of the yard and is nine feet high. What really fun about it is that it has some yellow blooms on branches of mostly red blooms. Our roses than grow in gravel areas that are watered by spot emitters stay under control. Those that are irrigated by spray emitters spread by underground runners and I have to constantly cut them back. It's a good idea to tackle them while wearing long sleeves. I sometimes forget and have thorn jab marks to prove it.

As I've mentioned before in this column, I'm planting more and more shrubs as I get older. I find they are easier to take care of if I get hardy ones!

To read more about these plants, visit AlamosaFlowers.net. All photos are from our Alamosa garden. Happy gardening!

"A garden to walk in and immensity to dream in – what more could he ask? A few flowers at his feet and above him the stars." Victor Hugo, "Les Miserables"