



# *Alamosa Landscapes*

## **Tips for Getting Alamosa Gardens Ready in Early March - Part 1**

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Early spring gardening in Alamosa isn't like many other places in our country. I am a bit envious as I read about what's blooming in places like Albuquerque, NM, right now. I calm myself by being reminded that I'm not envious when their temperatures reach over 100 degrees in the summer!

First, I'll give a brief explanation as to the status of our garden right now. The snow is mostly gone and most parts of the garden are not frozen above 2-4 inches. A couple of warm spots are unfrozen 10 inches down. I also noticed the ground is very moist right now so I won't try to water yet. Therefore, I don't remove weeds, improve the soil, or transplant anything right now. The soil needs to warm up more.

But there are a number of things one can do in the garden now – especially when the wind isn't blowing too much!

Clean up: Walk around and pick up any dead branches or weeds that are lying around – sadly weeds blow into our yard over the winter. I tend to get a gather a number of little branches that fall off of our narrow leaf cottonwood (*Populus angustifolia*) over the winter. Also, when we shovel the snow off our walks, bits of gravel end up on the lawn, so I put those back. Winter winds have a way of rearranging bark mulch so I put that back where it belongs, too.

If you haven't already, remove any perennial plant leaves and stems if you didn't in the spring. And if your garden soil is not too frozen, remove any annuals plants you had last summer. In the fall I often cut stems back to only 10 or so inches in order to help hold mulch I place on the garden. I am now cutting it all back to 2 inches.

I cut hops all the back to the ground. I leave the lovely vines on the trellis over the winter as I think they are beautiful. However, if I don't recycle them at the Alamosa Recycling Center in early spring I end up with lots of unwanted little hops plants all over the yard. I don't remove winter mulch at this time – I want to keep as much moisture in the soil as possible and it will be a few weeks until I think the plants need to see the sun more than maintain winter moisture. I rarely have anything bloom until the end of March.

I still need to do a bit of tree pruning. Before trees come out of hibernation is the best time to do this. I look at my trees each winter – it's easier to see any problems when there are no leaves. My happy hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*) developed 3 top branches last summer. Most deciduous trees do best if they have only one leader. I will get out a step ladder on the next wind free day and prune away all but one. I have a few limbs crossing over each other in my favorite Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra*) and will cut the least viable out soon.

I will also prune a few low hanging limbs over the sidewalk on a crabapple (*Malus*) at Jardine Hermosa Park across the street from our home. Trees limbs over walkways should be at least eight feet high according to Alamosa City ordinance. I have taken multiple pruning workshops from Vince Urbina, State Forester, and have the permission of the city to do this!

Recently, I've spent time learning about what shrubs should be pruned over the winter or in early spring. Many summer-blooming flowering shrubs (generally those that bloom from late June until fall) should be pruned now. In our area they include, some forms of hydrangea (we have cold hardy white blooming hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle') and summer-blooming spirea (quite a few so ask your nursery folk or check it out at [AlamosaFlowers.net](http://AlamosaFlowers.net)). These bloom on wood that grows in the current season, so there's no danger of cutting off flower buds that formed last year.

WARNING: Wait until right after flowering to prune spring-blooming shrubs such as lilac (our most prolific -- *Syringa*), forsythia (*Forsythia*), potentilla or cinquefoil (*Potentilla*), and artemisia (we have groundcover silver brocade artemisia - *Artemisia stellerana*). They form their new buds in the previous season. If you trim them before they bloom in the spring you won't have any blooms.

More tips next time. Visit [AlamosaTrees.net](http://AlamosaTrees.net) or [AlamosaFlowers.net](http://AlamosaFlowers.net) for more information on what grows well in Alamosa.

*"As I work on the garden, the garden works on me."* Gayla Trail