



Alamosa Landscapes

Beautiful flowers in Alamosa despite drought and wind

by Marilyn Loser

2020 June 3

About this time of the year I often report on the state of our Alamosa garden. It's definitely a mixed bag this year! Crabapples (*Malus* species) bloomed beautifully in downtown Alamosa by May 1; in our yard by May 5. Usually they don't bloom until a week or two later. I often felt that they bloomed the week AFTER Adams State graduation. This year they bloomed just in time, but there was no onsite commencement!

I've often associate the height of lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*) bloom during the yearly festival in Cole Park the first weekend in June. Ours will all be done then – my purple ones were done five days ago, but there are still some white blooms nodding their heads. Of course, there is no festival this year so out of town visitors to the festival won't be disappointed.

We are definitely in drought. By the end of May we've had only .79 inches of precipitation this year compared to 4.69 inches last year – almost four inches of precipitation difference! This is according to Wunderground.com. Some other sites may be more accurate, but I've used this one for many years and want to remain consistent.

It's also been very windy this spring to my mind. On top of this we had high temperatures of over 75 for the first two weeks of May when average temperatures don't top 68. And three of days those were record breakers of 80 or above (some weather sources reported we had a week of record breaking highs).

So what was lost in our garden? My biggest sadness is the loss of a wonderful Autumn Blaze maple (*Acer x freemanii*) that we'd had for 8 or more years. It's just dead and since it doesn't develop suckers from the roots, there is no hope. We lost a Canada chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana* 'Shubert') a few years ago, but as it promotes suckers. I now have a healthy Canada chokecherry shrub. It could be that warm February weather encouraged the sap to come up due to relatively high daily temperatures (most of which were in the 40's and 50's) that plummeted quickly in the night to below freezing. This could have caused the liquid in the cells to freeze and burst rather than drain down to the protected roots. On more than 1/3 of the days the temperature range was more than 35 degrees.

I was also surprised to see that most of our pussy toes (*Antennaria dioica* – natives I acquired outside of Gunnison) and mint (*Mentha* ?) haven't returned. Both of these have done well in past drought years

– have had them for 15 – 20 years. I’m also not seeing much in the way of Shasta daisies (*Leucanthemum* × *superbum*) or gloriosa daisies (*Rudbeckia hirta* ? – these are more lush than the black eyed Susans along highways) popping up. They are usually small at this time of the year, but in abundance. Fortunately, I have lots of gloriosa daisy seeds I harvested from last year – they tend to do well from seed. Shasta daisies I buy from nurseries as my attempts from seeds haven’t worked out. Sadly, the only ones I’ve seen so far are rated at zone 5 – I only plant zone 3 or zone 4 flowers. Some folks downtown, where plants are more protected, may get away with zone 5 plants. We are on the west end of town and get buffeted by high winds and there are no trees and no close buildings to the west of us so we tend to be colder.

What is doing well in this dry, windy year? Reliable red and pink yarrow (*Achillea* species) seems to be doing very well and bloomed a week earlier than usual as did purple creeping Veronica (*Veronica liwanensis*?) . Also, bush honeysuckle Arnold’s red (*Lonicera tatarian* 'Arnolds Red') did well in all locations in the garden. I added this shrub about five years ago for the first time. It tends to have the earliest flowers and has pleasant leaves the remainder of the season. As far as I can tell, it doesn’t sucker and keeps a neat, dense form. I now have six specimens in different locations in the garden and all are doing very well.

Wild red roses (*Rosa*) have bloomed a week earlier than usual as have yellow Harrison roses (*Rosa Harrison*). I’m seeing more dead branches than I like, but blooms are prolific.

I’m wishing you a wonderful summer of gardening, but encourage you to really watch your watering. The city has an ordinance, but be sure to water enough.

“I hope that while so many people are out smelling the flowers, someone is taking the time to plant some.” Herbert Rappaport