



# Alamosa Landscapes

## From Hot, Dry Summer to Fall and Maybe a Touch of Winter

*by Marilyn Loser*

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As reported last time in this column, our weather has been crazy this year for the Alamosa gardener. As you read this on Wednesday (I send the column in Tuesday morning) we may be having freezing temperatures, high winds, and snow. The wunderground.com website predicts the freezing low temperatures will continue through the week and return to above freezing the following week.

I cover my tomatoes (we did 15 plants this year and many fruits are still small, green, and not ready for harvest). Monday afternoon I picked all ripe tomatoes and some nearly ripe to be on the safe side. The nearly ripe with ripen in cardboard boxes in our cool storage shed or garage. I have all tomato plants tied to uprights and use inexpensive clear shower curtain liners and clip them to the uprights with clothespins to protect the plants from freezing. If we do have high winds, I hope the protection doesn't blow off.

I'll also cover the cucumbers that were slow to mature this year and are just now producing. Cucumbers are easier to cover as I can weigh the liners down with rocks.

We have root crops this year including yellow beets (yum!) and various types of carrots. I'm not worried about them for the next week or so.

I planted several varieties of winter squash this season. I got some kabocha squash (*Cucurbita maxima*) seeds from the Community Garden at the January Seed Exchange at the Adams State University library. I had never heard of them, but know the folks at the CG know what they are doing. Thank you, CGH people! Right now, I have several of the squash that are between 9 and 11 inches in diameter – hope I can pick them up – I'm no spring chicken! According to several websites, this squash is known as the Japanese pumpkin. It originated in Cambodia and can be used as you would use Hubbard squash. I'm looking forward to trying it!

I am also happy about my spaghetti and acorn squash, as well as pumpkin (I think). I needed to give winter squash some extra water in July and August – more than our automatic watering system provides the entire garden as it has been so hot and the large leaves wilted in the afternoon heat. The “what-I-think-are-pumpkins” came from seeds I discarded in the cold frames last year and they sprang up. I don't remember dumping them there. I transplanted them to other areas of the vegie garden outside of the cold frames and they are producing smooth, rounded

fruits.

A rule for harvesting winter squash is to leave it on the vine until the vines die back in fall. I've done this in the past with spaghetti and acorn squash and plan to do this with kabocha. If anyone out there has a different idea that's worked for them in Alamosa, please let me know at [mmloser@adams.edu](mailto:mmloser@adams.edu) and I'll pass it on.

I left foliage and seeds on perennial plants longer than usual this year. I told myself it was to let the seeds mature so I could harvest them later in the hope they produce new plants next year. Reality may be that the forest fire smoke has kept me out of the garden more than I'd like. Usually, I deadhead and trim perennials with clippers, but last weekend I used our weed whacker to cut down the seed heads and drying leaves of columbine (*Aquilegia* species), Maltese cross (*Lychnis chalconica*), snow in summer (*Cerastium tomentosum*), queen of the meadow (*Filipendula vulgaris kahome*), and sedum (*Sedum* species) since I want them to create new plants in the same garden beds. I'm pleased with the results, and boy, it went much faster!

I tend to start cutting down any drying leaves on shrubs and perennials this time of the year and use them to mulch the plants. It certainly helps to reduce evaporation from the soil. However, if we have limited moisture, it could keep that moisture from reaching down into the roots. It can be a hard call.

For your information: National Public Radio on Monday, September 7, said Amazon will no longer carry seeds from China. I didn't fact check this as I trust NPR. I did receive 2 suspect packages of seeds from Asia this season and burned them. If you received any, please don't just dump them in the garbage as they may germinate somewhere and could be a problem. I'll try to find out more.

Please stay safe and caring in this difficult time.

*"Change is threatening, but it's also how we grow. You need to repot yourself somehow."*  
Colonel Frederick Lough [deputy chair of surgery, Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences.]