



Alamosa Landscapes

Deer resistant, but not deer proof, plants

by Marilyn Loser

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First, tree planting opportunities coming up in Alamosa. We're celebrating Arbor week from May 11 to May 17. Already citizens planted trees at the Boyd Community Garden and the Rio Grande Farm Park.

Coming up is a planting on Saturday, May 11, 10 in the morning at the Alamosa Community Recreation Center Pavilion to provide a windbreak and shade for the new parking lot. There will be two plantings along the entry to the Alamosa Cemetery to complete the welcoming rows of evergreen trees. The first is Tuesday, May 14, 4:30 in the afternoon and the second is Wednesday, May 15 at noon. Please help – come for only a few minutes if you can to support Alamosa's Community Forest.

Onto deer – oh, dear! I bet most artificial flowers are deer proof – real ones not so much! I love my yard. I've heard some say, forget your flowers, and just enjoy the deer. Humbug! In this stress-ridden world, my garden is my refuge and retreat. It helps me maintain my sanity. And now, during the 'greening up' time of the year with dots of colorful spring bulbs blooming, my spirits soar.

Meanwhile, across the street in Jardin Hermosa, we've had upwards of 12 deer in the neighborhood many days in the last two weeks. Deer can no longer enter our yard due to fences, but many Alamosa neighbors aren't so fortunate. Deer can do a lot of damage and 12 in a group is no small thing. I've lived in this neighborhood since 1983 and it wasn't until about 2005 that we had deer in our yard. So deer weren't here first. This is a very arid part of Alamosa without domestic irrigation (i.e. we're not near the Rio Grande). There are too many deer now as people have removed their natural predators (coyotes and mountain lions) that kept the population in balance.

The main point of this column is to think about deer resistant plants -- now that my diatribe is over! Due to our more than double amount of average precipitation so far this year (as of Monday we had 2.96 inches compared to the average of 1.07 inches), I think the deer aren't as desperate for food as last year. Normally, deer don't attack geraniums or lilacs, but they did last year.

Plant deer –resistant specimens. The key word here is “resistant.” Deer usually avoid strong, smelly plants, thick or leathery leaves, and fuzzy, bristly or spiny plants. However, in Alamosa they will chomp away at young Colorado spruce and lilacs which are on most deer-resistant plant lists (many lists are available online).

The key is to think about plant characteristics that deer tend to avoid. According to the amdro.com website these include: (1) strongly scented foliage such as lavender (Munstead *Lavandula angustifolia*

'Munstead' is the only variety I've had return in our garden) (2) leathery leaves such as forsythia (*Forsythia*) and honeysuckle (*Lonicera tatarian* 'Arnolds Red'), (3) fuzzy leaves such as lamb's ears (*Stachys byzantine*) and woolly thyme (*Thymus lanuginosus*), and (4) prickly stems and leaves such as barberries and sea holly (*Eryngium*). Sadly, roses are an exception and deer will attack them.

Right now I have a lot of grape hyacinths and daffodils blooming all around my yard. They do well here and deer don't tend to like them. However, they love tulips as a snack.

While deer tend to avoid evergreens, especially prickly spruce, you should protect young trees with wire cages. This year the wonderful Alamosa crew from the Department of Parks and Recreation removed the wire cages from the two spruce trees in Jardin Hermosa. You can tell some of the bottom branches were eaten by deer some years ago when the wire cage was slammed up against the trunk by wind exposing young, tender branches to hungry deer.

In this column, I'm only including plants that do well in our Alamosa garden. You can find a more comprehensive list at AlamosaFlowers.net. Click on the Flower Lists, select the Flower Finder tab, click on the deer resistant checkbox and press the Find Plants button. Clicking on an individual plant will bring up a detail page with a photo.

Hardy perennials that return year after year include spring blooming columbines (*Aquilegia*), Oriental poppies (*Papaver oriental*), and blue flax (*Linum*). Flowers that bloom later in the season include Penstemon (*Penstemon*), most dianthus (*Dianthus*), blanket flower (*Gaillardia*), milkweed (*Asclepias speciose* – the ones monarch butterflies love), purple flowered May night meadow sage (*Salvia sylvestris* 'May Night'), shade loving ajuga ground cover, perennial yarrows (*Achillea*) and snow in summer (*Cerastium tomentosum*). Most of these are greening up now.

"People from a planet without flowers would think we must be mad with joy the whole time to have such things about us." Iris Murdoch