



# Alamosa Landscapes

## Contemplating Winter Trees

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I look closely at trees in our yard as I walk around on this grey day during the last week of November in Alamosa. Since most deciduous trees in Alamosa have dropped their leaves and flowering plants have gone dormant, I especially appreciate the green of our evergreen trees and shrubs.

I have three Austrian pines (*Pinus nigra* "Cimmaron") and one ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*). I love their long needles and graceful branching. I don't have any Colorado blue spruce (*Picea pungens*) but can see several from my second story home office including two in the Jardin Hermosa city park and three older ones that rise above buildings and most other trees in downtown Alamosa.

Spruce trees require more water than Austrian and ponderosa pines. The Colorado State University Plant Talk website ([planttalk.colostate.edu](http://planttalk.colostate.edu)) says, "Spruce and fir need extra water, so they are well-suited to lawns. On the other hand, pines and junipers will flourish in drier sites. When planting several different species of evergreen trees in the landscape, plant those with similar water needs in the same general area."

While all of my pines are doing well, the ones that get the most water are doing the best. All grow in well-drained soil. My favorite ponderosa in town is the one at the corner of Main St. and Poncha Ave. near Safeway. It was originally planted on the grounds of the old middle school and received enough water in a grassy area for it to flourish.

Now, it is doing ok but doesn't get much water as it is surrounded by pavement and sidewalks. While ponderosa have a taproot, they also have "a shallow lateral root system that extends as much as 100 feet(30 m) from the tree to absorb surface moisture quickly from rain and snow. These roots make it very difficult for winds to uproot Ponderosa pine" according to the Western Explorers website. I applaud its hardiness, but would not plant a young tree in the same spot.

If you don't plan to water much, junipers may be a good evergreen for you. Our yard has both sea green juniper (*Juniperus x media* "Sea Green") and blue rug juniper (*Juniperus horizontalis* "Wiltonii"). I highly recommend them both. I planted three sea greens about 16 years ago and they are now 4-7 ft. high and 8-12 ft. wide. Essentially, they receive the same amount of water from our automatic watering system that they received when first planted. During of couple of very dry summers I did provide extra water.

The blue rugs almost seem like rugs! They're 10 – 12 in. high and wide spreading. An excellent

ground cover for areas folks don't walk on. All the junipers have well drained soil and are in an area covered by gravel mulch. They certainly need a lot less water and care than grass.

Deciduous tree limbs cast interesting silhouettes against the grey sky. I check them out this time of the year to see what hand pruning I need to do from the ground. With the exception of crabapples (*Malus*), chokecherries (*Prunus*), and cottonwoods (*populous*), I find trees need little pruning if they had good structure when young and were lightly pruned during the first few years.

Both crabapples and my Canada Red chokecherries produce new small branches seemingly every year that poke up in any direction. I remove any that cross over other branches or come out of the main trunk in the bottom nine feet.

I typically don't water trees during the winter. However, if we have a dry and warm winter, I might add some water early in the afternoon on a warm day. I want any water to be absorbed in such a way that it's not trapped in the roots if we have a quick temperature decrease that we sometimes get. If too much water is trapped in cells and it freezes, it can burst the cells and cause root damage.

While not as lush as a summer landscape, I still enjoy walking the winter garden.

*"The care of the Earth is our most ancient and most worthy, and after all, our most pleasing responsibility."* Wendell Berry