



Alamosa Landscapes

More Native Flowers for Alamosa

by Marilyn Loser

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I've addressed native shrubs as well as native flowers that attract birds in this column over the past year. As I walk around my garden that is mostly put to bed for the winter, I contemplate other Colorado native flowers that I haven't discussed. I think of both those that I've had success with and those I haven't.

As a reference, I'm using the "Low-Water Native Plants for Colorado Gardens: Mountain 7,500' and Above" published by the Colorado Native Plant Society and available online in the .pdf format.

Consider groundcovers. I've done well with low pussytoes (*Antennaria* spp.) I got in valleys near Gunnison. They are only a couple of inches high and form dense clusters that prevent weeds from cropping up, have white flowers, need little water, and spread slowly. I can't tell the exact species. I used to have some taller ones (6-8 in. high in bloom) purchased from a nursery with pink flowers that I loved, but they have died out over the years. I'll look for some replacements this spring.

I've loved kinnikinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) ever since I lived in Colorado Springs in the 60's-70's. Mostly you'd see them in the hills outside the city under ponderosa pines. They are in the manzanita family and are considered evergreen shrubs (leaves turn purplish during Colorado's winter). I thought I had similar conditions in our garden, but they never survived for more than two years. While they tolerate cold and dry conditions once established, they like acidic soil. Much of my yard (and Alamosa) is the opposite -- alkaline.

I may try again this spring and establish an area for acid-soil loving plants. I have several Austrian pines which adapt to both alkaline and acidic soils. Since I remember kinnikinnick growing under pines, I might try those areas and increase the acidity in the soil. You can make soil more acidic by using sphagnum peat, iron sulfate, elemental sulfur, and organic mulches according to the Iowa State University's horticulture website.

Native plants I've had good luck with include golden banner or false snapdragon/lupine (*Thermopsis montana*), fleabane (*Erigeron speciosus*) and showy goldeneye (*Heliomeris multiflora*). Golden banner is an early bloomer and does well in my garden if we've had a wet winter. It has lovely yellow flowers that do look a lot like snapdragons. I don't water our garden during the winter and if it's a dry one, the plants don't even come up, much less bloom.

Blue fleabane has blue-purple blooms that show up in July and August. It is a very hardy perennial and stands 18 – 26" high. Interestingly, not all publications say it is native to Colorado. I received showy goldeneye (*Heliomeris multiflora*) many years ago in a native seed mixture.

Since then, I let the annual 1-3 ft. tall plants bloom where they will and just pull them out if they get in the way of other flowers. This year the yellow flowers bloomed from June through August.

Flowers I haven't done as well with but plan to plant again include Jacob's ladder (*Polemonium caeruleum*), orange wallflower (*Erysimum allionii*), scarlet gilia (*Ipomopsis aggregata*), and pasque flower (*Pulsatilla patens*)

Jacob's ladder has cup-shaped, deep blue flowers and blooms in May. I used to have quite a bit, but it has since died out. Orange wallflower is one of my all-time favorites. It stands 10 – 18" high and has lovely orange flowers during the summer. I had quite a few plants for many years, but they seem to have all died out and the last two times I planted them, they didn't return. While they are a perennial, I had the feeling many of mine came up from seed as they showed up in different spots around the garden.

Scarlet gilia grows in the hills on the western side of the San Luis Valley. It seems it should do well here, but I haven't had it come back. If you have any growing tips, please let me know! Pasque flower is abundant in the mountains SW of Alamosa. The Missouri Botanical Garden website says it is native to Europe and Siberia, but doesn't mention Colorado. It has deep purple flowers with yellow centers that grow low on the ground in the spring. It's known to tolerate drought and dry soil that is well-drained. Sounds like my yard! I don't know why it doesn't do well. Apparently, it's hard to start from seed, so I'll look for some plants and try again!

"A garden is a grand teacher. It teaches patience and careful watchfulness; it teaches industry and thrift; above all it teaches entire trust." Gertrude Jekyll