



# Alamosa Landscapes

## Seed Exchange and Online Gardening Resources

*by Marilyn Loser*

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Mark your calendars for the fifth annual “Seed to Seed Community Seed Exchange” to take place on Saturday, January 25, from 2-4 pm. It will be held on the first floor of Adam State University’s Nielsen Library. The goal is for San Luis Valley (SLV) gardeners to share seeds and information. Since our Januarys are usually so cold, I find meeting with others to exchange seeds and ideas gets me excited about the upcoming gardening season that can seem so far in the future. It’s not too early to plan. Hope to see you there!

This event is hosted by Nielsen’s “Seed to Seed: A Seed Library for the SLV”. The tag line is “Borrow seeds, grow ’em, then harvest and return some seeds for future gardeners!” Visit the website: [libguides.adams.edu/seedtoseed/exchange](http://libguides.adams.edu/seedtoseed/exchange). If you can’t make it to the exchange, you can check out seeds at the library. They now have 100% community provided seeds. I think this is a great accomplishment. Co-sponsors include the SLV Local Foods Coalition (SLV LFC), Valley Educational Gardens Initiative (VEGI), and the Alamosa Community Greenhouse.

Perhaps you’re contemplating growing vegetables or flowers this summer but aren’t sure what to plant when and where. There are some handy resources available online. For example, from the Seed Library homepage, click on the Flyers and Handouts tab and then on the SLV Planting Guide link.

This takes you to an elegant and easy to comprehend one-page, downloadable pdf file created by VEGI regarding when and where to plant herbs and vegetables. VEGI also has a Facebook page with an events link. Last year’s events included a how to backyard compost presentation and a microgreens workshop.

If you’re interested in planting a SLV-hardy flower garden, visit my Alamosa Flowers website ([alamosaflowers.net](http://alamosaflowers.net)) and click on the Hardy Garden tab. It gives details on 25 flowers that grow easily in our valley. All photos are of specimens from our garden, not from a catalog!

The SLV LFC ([slvlocalfoods.org](http://slvlocalfoods.org)) mission is “To foster an equitable local food system that restores the health of the people, community, economy and ecosystem.” The Rio Grande Farm Park ([riograndefarmpark.org](http://riograndefarmpark.org)) is under its direction and has monthly hands-on workshops. Past workshops included helping plant (and learn about plants) at the Farm Park during the summer and constructing birdhouses during the winter.

There are several good websites that are not specific to the valley. You have to be careful as our climate is unique and not the same as the rest of the state. However, in general, our state is higher in altitude than most others with an average elevation of 6,800 feet above sea-level. Alamosa is 7,536 feet and has

an average of 95 frost-free days. Monte is higher at 7,665 feet and has 97 frost-free days. I was surprised at this as I think of Monte Vista as being a fair amount warmer! In comparison, Denver's altitude is 5,280 feet and it typically has 155 frost-free days.

The United States Department of Agriculture has a plant hardiness zone map for Colorado. The Uncover Colorado website ([uncovercolorado.com/gardening-in-colorado](http://uncovercolorado.com/gardening-in-colorado)) has a link to the USDA zone map as well as tips for gardening at high altitudes. It lists Alamosa as 4b meaning our average annual extreme minimum temperature ranges from -25 to -20 degrees Fahrenheit. I tend to consider our yard to be 3b with minimum temperatures ranging from -35 to -30. I do OK in the warmest and most protected parts of the garden with zone 4 plants.

I also frequently refer to the Colorado State University Extension's website ([extension.colostate.edu](http://extension.colostate.edu)) for guidance. If you're new to Colorado gardening, I encourage you to search for their pdf fact sheet "Challenge to Newcomers – 7.220". One of the surprising facts is that while our state name, Colorado, comes from the Spanish words "color rojo", meaning color red due to the iron in our red soils, that iron is not available to most of our plants. According to the website, "Colorado's highly calcareous (chalk or limestone) soils tie up the iron in a form unavailable to the plant."

Writing this column has given me the idea that I need to add a Resources link (with caveats) to the AlamosaFlowers.net and AlamosaTrees.net websites. I'll keep you updated. Meanwhile, Happy New Year and garden planning.

*"There are two seasonal diversions that can ease the bite of any winter. One is the January thaw. The other is the seed catalogues."* Hal Borland