



Alamosa Landscapes

Notable Trees and Urban-Nature Connection

by Marilyn Loser

2020 February 19

Request: Do you know of any notable trees (large, beautiful, or unusual) in Alamosa that can be seen from the street/sidewalk? I'm hoping to put together a "Notable Tree Walk" as part of Alamosa's spring celebration of being a Tree City for 30 years. If you do, please call me at 719.937.2546 or email me at Marilyn@AlamosaTrees.net. I would really appreciate the help!

"Individuals who visit natural spaces weekly, and feel psychologically connected to them, report better physical and mental wellbeing," according to the online Science Daily. It can be especially hard for folks in large cities to interact with nature frequently. U.S. cities are home to 62.7 percent of the U.S. population, but comprise just 3.5 percent of land area according to a Census Bureau press release.

While Alamosa is not a large city and many San Luis Valley residents live outside of town, I bet a lot of people don't get out to enjoy green/open spaces frequently. And this can be a wellbeing problem.

A University of Exeter study of 20,000 people found that "people who spent two hours a week in green spaces — local parks or other natural environments, either all at once or spaced over several visits — were substantially more likely to report good health and psychological well-being than those who don't." This was a large study that included people from many walks of life, ethnicities, ages, socio-economic status, and levels of wellness. The researchers are adamant about the two hours per week! That works out to about 23 minutes per day.

I can understand that this amount of time can be difficult for many folks to achieve — but it is a great goal. There are a lot of demands on our lives. When I was teaching at Adams State I was fortunate to be able to walk back and forth to work across mostly open fields south of campus. Now that I'm retired, my husband and I try to take daily walks around our neighborhood that includes Jardin Hermosa Park and lots of open space with great views of the mountains east and west. In the summer, it is easy to make the two hour quota as we have a large garden with trees, shrubs, and flowers that I enjoy spending time in.

It needs to be pointed out that many studies on the topic of the benefits of nature on human beings are correlational rather than causal. This means it's hard to show that spending time in natural landscapes actually cause these effects. It could be argued that those who feel healthy make sure to spend time in

nature. However, I know I feel better when I spend time outside in green surrounding such as parks and gardens.

Even the World Health Organization weighs in on this. They recommend every city provide a minimum of nine square meters (about 100 square feet – think of an area 10 ft. by 10 ft.) of urban green space for each person.

So what green spaces, other than people's yards, does Alamosa provide? We have 12 parks as well as dike trails along the Rio Grande, hiking trails in the Alamosa Ranch, and roads in the Alamosa Cemetery. Check out the Alamosa City website and search for "City Parks and Recreation Facilities" to see a .pdf file map showing our parks.

In our own country, the Trust for Public Lands has mapped 14,000 communities (86% of the nation) and has a campaign to work with mayors across the nation to make sure all people have access to a park within a 10-minute walk, according to a January 2020 report on "How immersing yourself in nature benefits your health" by the Public Broadcasting System (pbs.org).

It's harder to get started during our cold winters and windy spring days. Perhaps, you can pick nicer days and walk to and around a park. Need something from the store and you don't live too far away? Why not walk? Have a coffee break? Why not take a walk outside? I know the more I get out, the more I crave to get out!

Many studies show that time in nature is an antidote for stress. It can lower blood pressure and stress hormone levels that lead to improved moods and reduced levels of anxiety according to the PBS article.

Now that daylight is increasing, I hope you can find time to enjoy green spaces around Alamosa!

"In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks." John Muir