



Alamosa Landscapes

Tips for Getting Alamosa Gardens Ready in Early March - P 2

by Marilyn Loser

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Last time I discussed tidying up the yard while the ground was still largely frozen. Two weeks later and I've had a couple of early bulbs bloom, grass and ground covers are greening up, and the soil has thawed to the depth of one foot. I'm encouraged by the appearance of small purple iris (*Iris reticulata*) and purple crocus (*Crocus*) blooms in my warmest garden bed!

Now is a great time to pull any unwanted grass in the yards. It's relatively easy to pick out as it greens up earlier than almost any other plant. Make sure to get all of the roots that you can.

It's warm enough now that I'm removing over-winter mulch from my warmest beds. I've waited until now as I always hope to retain as much moisture as possible. Once I remove mulch I have to be careful to keep the beds moist. It may be a bit early to start up our outdoor watering systems – I'd hate for a late freeze to break some pipes – so I'll use a watering can or hook up a hose to an indoor faucet. Be careful what time of day you water, especially if we have a cold spell.

Allow time for the soil and plants to absorb the water. If a plant just received a big dose of water and its cells are full, a sudden freeze can cause the water to freeze in the cells and burst, harming, and perhaps killing, the plant.

But since some wildflower seeds and plants do much better if they receive direct sunshine, it's time to remove covering mulch and any leaves or stems left from last season.

Quite a few tulip (*Tulipia*), daffodil (*Narcissus*), and grape hyacinth (*Muscari*) leaves have popped up a few inches. Ground covers such as creeping phlox (*Phlox stolonifera*), veronicas (*Veronica*), and ornamental thyme (*Thymus serpyllium*) are greening nicely. There are even a few columbine leaves poking up. Hardy perennials such as native Artemisia (*Artemisia*) have new blue-green growth.

I try to keep garden soil in good shape. Sometimes I mix in some new soil I purchase locally, but if the soil seems loose I will just top dress with a soil conditioner such as Happy Frog.

I still have some pruning to do. It's not too late for shrubs or trees in our yard as they still appear dormant. It's easier on the plants to trim now and it's easier for the gardener as you can see the

plant structure since leaves aren't in the way. For shrubs I try to make sure branches aren't too tightly packed. It's important to allow air to move freely through to help reduce pests that thrive when air flow is restricted.

Are you going to plant a garden this year in the San Luis Valley? If so, and you aren't sure what or when to plant, I encourage you to download the excellent "San Luis Valley Planting Calendar". It indicates dates for starting plants indoors, planting outdoors, and harvesting.

It's presented in a colorful and easy to understand format and is part of the valley Educational Gardens Initiative (VEGI) that "connects communities and partners across the San Luis Valley with garden-based education opportunities and resources."

To obtain a copy, go to the Adams State University seedtoseed homepage (<http://libguides.adams.edu/seedtoseed>), then select the Flyers and Handouts tab on the left side, and finally click on the SLV Planting Guide.

"Tickle the Earth with a hoe, it will laugh a harvest." Anonymous