



Alamosa Landscapes

Gardening in windy, dry conditions

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I think this has been the windiest and driest spring I've encountered in Alamosa. "Wind damages plants by breaking branches, blowing off, or shredding leaves and flowers," according to the Marin (California) Master Gardeners webpage. "The constant back-and-forth motion of gusting wind can knock trees over, take down shrubs and wreak havoc on a plant's root structure."

Wind also affects plant transpiration. It causes water to evaporate from a leaf's surface more quickly than it can be replaced water in the soil. A plant that is dried out is much more susceptible to damage and disease than one that is properly hydrated.

So what can we do? One option is to choose plants that are more resilient in windy, dry conditions. This includes plants that bend in the wind, have smaller or feathery leaves that aren't easily shredded, and deep and/or large root systems. Also ground covers that aren't very tall are less likely to suffer from wind damage.

In our garden some of my wind resilient favorites that are blooming now include columbines (*Aquilegia species*), Icelandic poppies (*Papaver nudicaule*), California poppies (*Eschscholzia californica*), yarrow (*Achillea species*), bishop's weed (*Aegopodium variegatum*), astilbe (*Astilbe x arendsii*), and some daisies (*Chrysanthemum species*).

Right now I have hundreds of columbine blooms and many are three feet tall. They whip around in our high winds but show no damage. The foliage of yellow and orange Icelandic poppies stays fairly close to the ground and the delicate blooms are at the end of long flexible stems. Annual California poppies are very drought tolerant and the foliage is very feathery allowing the wind to flow through. Red and pink yarrow also has very feathery leaves. I still have some early blooming ox-eye daisies whose fern-like foliage and blooms with many small petals easily bend to the wind. I am aware that ox-eye daisies are on the Colorado no-sale list. They take over in some environments, but not in our harsh environment.

Bishop's weed (*Aegopodium variegatum*), astilbe (*Astilbe x arendsii*), and perennial baby's breath (*Gypsophila paniculata*), on the other hand, have very feathery blossoms that allow the air to flow through.

Other plants that aren't blooming now but have pliable branches and deep roots include daylilies (*Hemerocallis fulva*), zinnias (*Asteraceae*), nasturtiums (*Tropaeolum*), and cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster acutifolia*). Short groundcovers are also a good choice for windy conditions.

You can view photos and read more about most of the plants at the AlamosaFlowers.net website under the Flower Lists tab.

Gardening in windy climates involves more than just choosing wind-resilient plants. Consider the garden setting. Most city yards aren't large enough to have a windbreak of several rows of trees. However, most yards can accommodate some sort of wind screen. The best wind screens don't completely block the wind, but temper it by allowing some air through. Leafy plants make ideal wind screens, but other more permanent things can also be used in groups such as a section of fence or a wall. According to the Marin website, "The barrier should be porous (about two-thirds solid to one-third openings or holes) and at right angles to the prevailing wind direction." In Alamosa, our prevailing winds usually come from the southwest so place a windscreen to the southwest of whatever you want to protect.

You need to be aware that the wind doesn't always come from the southwest. Earlier this spring we had some nasty, cold winds from the north.

Water management is extremely important. I have had to water more this year than in most other years due to both the high winds and drought. Lilacs in one part of the garden aren't looking as good as usual even though they are on a timed drip system. I've had to add additional water from a hose.

We mulch shrubs and trees with gravel or shredded bark mulch to help keep water evaporation down. I prefer shredded bark mulch over chipped wood or bark as the filaments intertwine and keep it from blowing very much. Here's hoping the winds will die down soon and we'll receive some summer moisture.

"A garden is a friend you can visit anytime." Unknown