



Alamosa Landscapes

Rain, Weeds, and Flowers

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Our garden has loved all the rain in the past week – as have I! Of course I'm happy about the flowers, but not about the weeds.

Right now magenta phlox (*Phlox paniculata*), blue delphinium (*Delphinium grandiflorum* 'blue butterfly'), and yellow heliopsis (*Heliopsis helianthoides* 'summer sun') are prolific. All spread by roots and gently reseed. I haven't planted any in at least 10 years and each year they are lovely in late July and early August.

I've tried growing other colors of phlox, but only the magenta ones are sustainable in our garden. These cobalt blue delphiniums are smaller and bloom later than the giant ones. I love their rich color; there aren't many blue flowers around! Yellow heliopsis only grows to about 2 ½ feet these days because they are largely shaded by a maturing cottonwood. I don't have to stake them!

I've discussed pink and red yarrow (*Achillea* 'Paprika') earlier this year. Amazingly, this 1 – 1 ½ ft. tall plant is just now starting to lose color and it has been blooming vigorously since mid-May. I keep a spreadsheet and mark what's in bloom about once a week. A bonus is that this yarrow needs very little care as it forms dense clumps that discourage weeds.

White Shasta daisies (*Chrysanthemum maximum*) and lavender Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*) are blooming nicely, but we don't have as many as we used to have. The clumps of daisies range between 1 and 3 ft. in height. We lost more than half of our plants last winter. They were in beds that were more exposed to the wind and sun and had sandier soil than the survivors. They do prefer rich, moist soil.

Russian sage will spread, especially if there's open ground. Other shrubs have grown up over the years and crowded some of them out. While they can grow to 4-5 ft. tall in very sunny areas, mine are mostly 2-3 ft. high. The only care they need are occasional doses of fertilizer and cutting back in the fall.

You can see photos from our garden of the above plants and learn more about them at AlamosaFlowers.net.

While I prefer talking about flowers, I think it's also important to talk about weeds. They've had an easier time in our garden this year during both drought times and wet times. The most prolific weed I see around Alamosa is kochia ((*Kochia scoparia*). It is an annual broadleaf weed that becomes a tumble weed in the fall. The good news about them is that are fairly easy to pull, unless you let them get to 6 ft. tall as I see in some areas of town. The bad news is that since they tumble and fly in the air, they are very good at traveling from surrounding areas. As weed free as I keep my garden, I get a fresh batch of kochia each year.

Four harder weeds to control are lamb's quarters (*Chenopodium album*), field bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*), goat heads or puncture vine (*Tribulus terrestris*), and spotted or prostrate spurge (*Euphorbia maculata*).

I know some folks like to eat lamb's quarters. I don't care for it. Back when I was young I would spend time camping by myself in the Colorado Mountains and try to just eat wild plants for several days. I never really cared for the taste, but it was good to find then. There are two things I really don't like about them. One, it has very deep, vigorous roots that are hard to remove. Two, it spreads copiously. It spreads by roots, easily sprouts from seeds, and crowds desirable plants out.

Field bindweed may be as abundant in Alamosa as kochia. However, it is not as obvious as this morning glory vine relative lies on the ground if it doesn't have something to climb. Some folks even enjoy its white/pink flowers. It has deep roots and very thin stems. In our garden it insinuates itself in full gardens and twines itself around the thicker stems of desirable plants. It's a daily chore to look around and pull them as I see them. Still, I'm often surprised to see one at 3 ft. long winding its way up a lovely flower.

I call goat heads 'ouch plants'. These low plants produce vicious sharp seeds that easily cut into your foot if you step barefoot on one and they stick to the bottom of my shoes as we walk the neighborhood in the winter. They are hard to pull as they grow so close to the ground. We've found a small hula hoe – one with a triangular head with a sharp edge that can get between other plants and cut the weed off at ground level.

"Butterflies are self-propelled flowers." Robert A. Heinlein