



Alamosa Landscapes

A Crazy Year in the Garden

by Marilyn Loser

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Your trees, flowers, and shrubs need more water than usual right now. OK, we live in the San Luis Valley and there may not be any usual! Coupled with high heat and low precipitation, foliage in many places in Alamosa doesn't look too good. Tuesday we had a record breaking high of 90 for the date and last Wednesday and Thursday we had record breaking highs of 92 and 90 according to the Wunderground weather website. Saturday, Sunday, and Monday our highs were only 1 degree below the record. For additional craziness we had a day in July when we had both a record low and a record high – it even made national news!

We've had only 2.73 inches of precipitation so far this year as compared to an average of 4.58 inches. Last year's to-date amount was 6.02 inches. I am watering more but trying to do it in a reasonable way. I try to water deeply and less frequently. For me that means running the hose slowly so the water sinks into the ground instead of just hitting the top of the soil. I also have a fair amount of mulch in many places combined with drip irrigation under the mulch so the moisture is more likely to soak in instead of evaporating.

On the bright side, the high winds have diminished!

I'm not a fan of all the wild fire smoke, but just learned that "their smoke plumes may help crops and other plants use sunlight more efficiently", according to the "Journal of Geophysical Research: Biogeosciences." So what's going on? The article states that the total amount of sunlight available to plants for photosynthesis decreased only slightly with the smoke haze, by about 4%, compared to the previous summer. However, the haze scatters the light which increases the amount of diffuse light by about a third. According to the report, "Whereas direct sunlight might fall mainly on upper foliage, leaving the rest of a plant in shade, diffuse light can reach a greater number of photosynthesizing leaves throughout the vegetation canopy. Because of the haze, plants used the available light nearly twice as efficiently." Wow! Go plants!

Due to the smoke and not being able to see either the Sangre de Cristo range on the east or the San Juan range on the west, I'm staying inside as much as possible during the time of the year that I typically spend a lot of it outside. Oh, well. I'm glad we're safe and I hope you are as well.

I'm enjoying harvesting snow peas, greens, and cherry tomatoes. Larger tomatoes are just now turning red. Knowing we weren't going anywhere this summer due to the coronavirus, we planted a larger vegetable garden than we have in the last several years. I'm hoping to replant some hardy greens such as

kale, mustard greens, and chard for harvesting this fall as the spring plants are starting to go to seed. If I cover the greens if there is a frost warning they might last until sometime in October.

While I have fewer flower varieties blooming in August, there is still a lot of color in the garden. As you know, many perennials only bloom for a short time each year, but come back the next. A few stay for a protracted time in our garden. I know I've mentioned some of these before, but with this tough season I think it's worth reporting on what ones have continued to bloom for at least 5 weeks. The following are ones that have continual bloom on a single plant: baby's breath (*Gypsophila paniculata*), pink bee plant (*Monarda*), blue fleabane (*Erigeron 'Azure Fairy'*), wild geranium (*Geranium caespitosum*), poppy mallow (*Callirhoe involucrata*), and pink/red sedum (*Sedum* species).

Others that have continual bloom in a colony (those that share a garden bed but may not be on a single plant) include Rocky Mountain purple penstemon (*Penstemon strictus*), small delphinium (*Delphinium grandiflorum* 'bl butterfly'), Maltese cross (*Lychnis chalcidonica*), creeping buttercups (*Ranunculus plentiflorus*), and magenta cornflower (*Centaurea hypoleuca*),

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"There is a fine line between 'hobby' and 'mental illness'." Dave Barry