



Daffodils Aren't the Only Deer-Resistant Bulbs

by Marilyn Loser

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The red of the few Autumn Blaze Maples around town dazzle the eyes. My favorite is the one at Zapata Park – go see it! Cottonwoods and aspens are turning golden and my ash trees have dropped most of their green leaves due to the recent cold nights. My thoughts turn to spring and bulbs.

Earlier this week I planted 97 bulbs (but who's counting?). The brightly colored photos in the glossy flower catalogues are very alluring. Happily, my spring blooms don't look too bad in comparison. Sometimes my blooms are smaller in size than those advertised, but the colors are as bright.

For many people, one barrier to growing beautiful bulbs in Alamosa is the [OH] DEER. Deer don't tend to like strong odors, but if they are starving, they will eat just about any plant.

While there are no deer-proof bulbs, daffodils, in the *Narcissi* genus, come the closest. You can extend bloom time by planting early, mid, and late spring varieties. There are hundreds of varieties and the color isn't limited to yellow. I've had very good luck with the Orangery Daffodil (*Narcissus Orangery*) with its orange center and white outer petals. They bloom beautifully alongside lavender creeping phlox (*Phlox stolonifera*). This year I planted Butterfly Centannees that has a larger orange center.

Since much of my yard is very windy in the spring, I feature shorter bulb species in most beds and in our wild grass area. I've had good luck with yellow 'Tete a Tete' that grows to about 8" high. I planted 'New Baby' this year that has white petals edged with yellow and should be 6-8" high.

So what other bulbs are considered deer-resistant and grow well in the San Luis Valley? I consider zone 3 and some zone 4 plants to be cold hardy enough for the valley. My list includes *Allium*, *Muscari*, *Crocus*, *Iris reticulata*, *Ipheion*, *Hyacinthoides*, *Hyacinthus*, *Chionodoxa*, and *Scilla*. Of these, the only genus that has tall blooms is *Allium*, or flowering onion. The name means garlic in Latin. They grow from bulbs or bulb-like rhizomes and come in a variety of colors and sizes. "Most Alliums grow best in full sun, with at least 6-8 hours of direct sun a day," according to the White Flower Farm website. "Those we offer require well-drained soil and are longest lived in locations where the soil is on the dry side during summer dormancy." They work well in xeriscape gardens in our area.

Grape hyacinths (*Muscari*) appear in many valley gardens. Aptly named for their grape-like spikes, I've never had these fail. They range from purple to light blue and the clusters expand each year.

Crocuses do well in cold winter areas like ours. Colors in my yard range from purple to orange. They don't tend to be as large as those in the photos I see, but they do persist.

Iris reticulate is often the first flower that blooms in my garden -- in some years it peeks up out of the snow. It's only 3" tall, is a dark purple, and develops its leaves after the flowers bloom.

I love blue Spring Starflower (*Ipheion uniflorum*) which does OK in my yard even though I've seen them listed as zone 5. They grow 6-10" tall and have light blue petals with darker blue stripes. They do well in shady areas as well as partially sunny areas. I just planted a pink species (*Ipheion 'Charlette Bishop'*) that I hope will do as well.

I'm going to try Wood Hyacinths (*Hyacinthoides*) and hope they'll do better than the regular hyacinths (*Hyacinthus*) in our garden. I call them 'Alamosa Hyacinths' since they are a far cry from the florist version. I love the scent, but the blooms are rather scrawny.

Two other overlooked, deer-resistant bulbs are *Chionodoxa* and *Scilla*. I do alright with starry blue *Chionodoxa* (*Chionodoxa forbesii*) and the bluebell *Scilla* (*Scilla siberica*). Neither has flourished or spread, but they each make a showing in the early spring.

Sadly, deer LOVE tulips, one of my favorite bulbs. In fact, when deer ate an entire row of tulips last summer, we added two strings of wire above much of our 4-foot high wood fence to raise the height to 6 feet. However, the fence along the front of the yard is only 4-foot high so they can still jump in. Over the winter I need to figure out how to attractively fortify that area.

You can view images of most of these flowers using the Flower Index at AlamosaFlowers.net.

"I love spring anywhere, but if I could choose I would always greet it in a garden. " Ruth Stout