



Summer Garden Dreaming

by Marilyn Loser

2014 January 8

Seed and plant catalogues stuffed my mailbox today and the temperature soared to 15 degrees F by mid-afternoon. Summer garden dreaming! It's a good day to work on my wish list of perennials and review garden notes and photos from last summer. I have a list of at least a dozen perennials I'd like this spring. Some are new to me and some are old favorites that have died out.

I'm looking to replant *Asclepias (Asclepias tuberosa)*. It has wonderful orange blooms late in the summer. A Colorado native it is deer resistant and likes well-drained soil. I used to have quite a few. *Asclepias* plants come up later than Icelandic Poppies (*Papaver nudicaule*), Meadow Anemones (*Anemone canadensis*), and Buttercups (*Ranunculus acris 'Flore Pleno'*) that shared the bed with them. I think the early risers drove them out. I'll try planting them in another bed. I haven't had luck with starting them from seed so will seek nursery stock. By the way, the aforementioned flowers are hardy, early bloomers in Alamosa.

Another Colorado native I'd like to introduce to my garden is Poncha Pass Red Sulfur Buckwheat (*Eriogonum umbellatum 'Poncha Pass Red'*). And yes, it grows on Poncha Pass between the San Luis Valley and Salida. It has showy umbels of bright yellow in late spring. As the flowers mature into seeds they turn a brilliant orange-red extending their season of interest.

This buckwheat is actually a long-lived miniature shrub. I've had a single buckwheat plant of a different variety in my year for about 10 years; it's a very reliable bloomer. The Poncha Pass Buckwheat grows about 4-6" tall so I'll plant it in a rock garden that features ground covers. I have a couple of low beds that extend the sense of lawn, but with more color and less water and maintenance.

Another low growing native I intend to plant is Gold on Blue Prairie Zinnia (*Zinnia grandiflora 'Gold on Blue'*). I had a different variety that lasted for several years in my garden. It likes full morning sun, but can tolerate afternoon shade. I have just the place for it. The yellow flowers that bloom for more than a month are backed by foliage that has a distinct blue tinge. It spreads by suckers, does well in a variety of soils, and is very xeric once established.

I also have my eye on Nearly Red Pineleaf Beardtongue (*Penstemon pinifolius 'Nearly Red'*). It should do well in the xeric garden and is resistant to deer. Native blue and pink penstemons thrive in my garden (and along the roadside near Blanca), but I'd like to try this red variety. It grows to 18" high. I plan to plant it with my Golden Rod (*Solidago Canadensis*).

Besides dreaming of summer, I'm spending my indoor winter time upgrading websites. The AlamosaTrees.net website now works well on mobile phones and laptops as well as desktop computers.

Check it out! I'm working on converting the AlamosaFlowers.net website. It features flowers that we have grown in our Alamosa garden over more than 25 years.

I'm happy that at least a half of a foot of snow blankets our yard. It keeps plants frozen in place and prevents them from drying up and shriveling away. We've had a few recent winters that were so dry and mild (for Alamosa) that the soil was like powder. I lost a number of perennials. Well-established plants and those with deeper roots fared the best. While there is a temptation to water perennial beds during warm, dry winters, I usually didn't. Even if the days are mild, the temperatures plunge at night causing moisture that the plants absorbed to freeze and burst plant cells. Alamosa is not the easiest gardening environment!

I have a year-long need for colorful flowers in my life and am happy to have a small indoor greenhouse (part of our passive solar system) with several prolific geraniums. My kitchen counter gets a lot of indirect sunlight in the winter and is ideal for an orchid plant such as the purple Moth Orchid (*Phalaenopsis*) that has bloomed since early October. I'm also delighted with the Helleborus (*Helleborus 'HGC Jacob'*) that a friend gave us in mid December. It has cheerful, white-faced flowers and has bloomed continuously with more bud coming along.

May your winter days be bright and dreams sunny.

"I call to mind the summer day, the early harvest mowing; the sky with sun and clouds at play, and flowers with breezes blowing."

John Greenleaf Whittier