



A Bit of Green Is Poking Through

by Marilyn Loser

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What a difference a week makes! Warm days (a record high of 62 degrees on Saturday) and wind melted most of the snow. I'm sorry to see the snow go so quickly as it was insulating the soil – but my vote didn't count. Last week I could only probe 1-2 inches into the ground; this week anywhere from 2 – 8 inches. And the soil is wet! Yahoo!

I smile as I recall a day in late February when I was still teaching at Adams State. A student raced into my office, excitedly grabbed my hand and dragged me outside to the lawn and dramatically pointed to a blooming Dandelion. Never had one looked so good! It was the first outside bloom of the season.

I have mixed feelings about seeing garden green right now – the third week of February seems a bit early. I'm sure there's more cold weather coming up and I hope plants don't get damaged. Warm February weather can cause tender buds to form only to be frozen during a subsequent cold snap. I've especially had this happen to Forsythia (*Forsythia*) and Flowering Almond (*Prunus triloba plena*)

Right now in my garden, small plants with shallow roots nestled in warm spots next to rocks are showing signs of green. These are the very plants that nearly died in past dry winter seasons. And this is new green – not left-over green leaves that freeze dried in November. Sweet William (*Dianthus barbatus*) sometimes fools me in this way. No blooms yet.

Hardy creeping veronica growing between pink flag stones is looking good. Slender leaves of Crocus (*Crocus*) and Grape Hyacinth (*Muscari*) are definitely making themselves known. Surprisingly to me, a number of Thyme (*Thymus*) varieties are greening up. I think of them coming out of hibernation later.

Several varieties of Sedum are coming to life. Dragon's Blood Sedum (*Sedum spurium 'Bronze Carpet'*), that shows grey stems in the winter, has very red stems and a few nascent red leaves. Snow in Summer (*Cerastium tomentosum*) has a tinge of blue in warmer beds, but I see little of creeping phlox (*Phlox stolonifera*). Patty, my sister in law from Albuquerque, posted phlox blooming in her garden. I feel we're often 4-6 weeks behind Albuquerque bloom times.

Early Buttercups (*Ranunculus asiaticus*) and Ox-eye Daisy (*Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*) leaves are showing up. I know these leaves are new as they dropped all last year's leaves by November.

I mulch my flower beds with leaves and clippings as much as I can. At this point, I raise the matted masses a bit to peek underneath and make sure any emerging plants get some air. Right now, I'm concerned about protecting plants from fluctuating temperatures, not with exposing them to sunlight.

In a less protected bed, I noticed pink Soapwort (*Saponaria ocymoides*) leafing out. I was looking in the same area for Golden Banner (*Thermopsis montana*) that is frequently my first bloomer of the season – it is nowhere to be seen.

A couple of deeper rooted plants surprised me today. I measured one Blue Flax (*Linum lewisii*) leaf at six inches and several other plants are sporting leaves of about the same size. They are all in sandy, well-drained soil behind rocks. I also noticed a Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum aquilegifolium*) plant I installed last year has a nice crown of green leaves.

I've had the pleasure of our garden for almost 30 years so I can identify many plants by their location and foliage. It wasn't always the case. I once ran out to buy more happy Icelandic Poppies when they were actually Chrysanthemums. I'm trying to live and learn!

The flowers mentioned in the column are amongst the earliest and hardiest in the garden. For more information take a look at the Flower Lists at AlamosaFlowers.net.

I was dismayed, but not surprised, to see bright green grass sprouting up in places where I don't want it. This is really a good time to spray with Roundup since most other plants aren't up yet and Roundup only affects green leaves. I've also noted a few other greening weeds that I recognize but don't know the names of. I try to dig them out, but the roots are often stuck in the frozen soil and I end up using Roundup.

So what are garden chores right now? For me, it's removing deer poop – probably at least a gallon.

“I grow plants for many reasons: to please my eye or to please my soul, to challenge my patience, for novelty or nostalgia, but mostly for the joy in seeing them grow.” David Hobson