



## Pacing, Planning, Whacking, and Weeding

*by Marilyn Loser*

2015 April 8

Events: *Gardening Talk*: Please join me Thursday evening, April 9, 6 – 7:30 p.m. in the Nielsen Library (NL) at Adams State University for a talk on “The Challenge and Joy of Gardening in the San Luis Valley” as part of the library’s Earth, Water, and Sky conversation series. All talks are free and open to the public. As the NL website (<http://blogs.adams.edu/library/>) says, “Light refreshments will be provided. Bring your curiosity and a friend or two!”

*Arbor Week Tree Planting*: During today’s Alamosa Tree Board meeting, Arbor Week (April 14 – 20) tree planting times and locations will be set following the completion of the Park Tree Inventory funded by a grant from the Colorado Tree Coalition. We’ll publish the schedule on the AlamosaTrees.net website, in the Valley Courier, and on the radio. We’d love to have your help!

I pace around my garden taking stock of what I need to do soon and planning what I want to accomplish this season. I’ve already peaked under the layer of leaf/compost mulch put down last fall and relocated or lightened most of it. I want to protect tender sprouts from our cold nights while allowing them light and air. Lots of lavender creeping phlox is blooming along with white and orange jonquils. Many low, spring bulbs are sending up leaves. Golden Banner (false snapdragon) is doing well this spring. Already it has lots of buds. Unless we have good moisture in February and/or March, it doesn’t bother to come out of hibernation!

Over the winter I leave many decorative stalks such as Autumn Joy sedum, baby’s breath, fall asters, hens and chicks, tarragon, and yarrow. I’ve been whacking down last year’s growth before new growth gets tall enough to make it a tough job. Some of the sedum is already up 3 inches. Hops vines are popping up and I still need to pull last year’s husks from the arbors.

April (and even March) is a great time to start a weeding program. While much of the garden is still brown, clumps of unwanted salt grass are coming up. It’s much easier to pull them before desired plants green up and become entwined with the grass. I try to keep ahead of dreaded whitetop (hoary cress). It’s already greening up in one of my flower beds. One plant can produce from 1,200 – 4,800 seeds and they blow in from the neighborhood.

I still struggle to get rid of butter and egg (yellow toadflax) that I bought at a nursery in New Mexico many years ago. I used to love seeing it in the mountains, but didn’t know how invasive it could become in my garden. The plants are already cheerfully waving at me from under currant bushes. It’s difficult to pull them without damaging the currants. I’ll post some photos under the Flower Lists tab at AlamosaFlowers.net. Since I’ve gardened in the same place for more than a quarter of a century, I’m mostly able to identify weeds even in the early stages.

Walking around I noticed several areas in the garden have compacted soil so I’ll add some compost and soil conditioner. I’ll do the same for sandy areas. Each year I try to improve the soil. Originally some parts of the

yard were thick clay while other parts were very sandy. The goal is for loamy soil that holds water, is easy to dig, and allows air to reach plant roots.

The last few days, the winds have been picking up and the soil is drying out so I'm doing some hand watering. It's probably a bit early to turn on the low pressure drip system as the lines are just under or on the soil surface and we could have some hard freezes ahead. It's not a big problem if the temperature briefly dips below freezing. However, extended periods of below freezing temperatures can cause the water lines to freeze and burst.

We've been eating greens from the cold frame the last few weeks. I planted the seeds in August for fall harvest. Apparently, some didn't germinate then. I will plant some hardy greens and radishes in the cold frame in the next few days. The seeds are from Adams State University's seed catalog (visit the News tab at [AlamosaFlowers.net](http://AlamosaFlowers.net) for an article and link to the seed catalog).

*"A weed is a plant that is not only in the wrong place, but intends to stay."* Sara Stein