



Pulling, Picking, Deadheading, and Enjoying

by Marilyn Loser

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The summer weather in Alamosa is very peculiar this year. Perhaps that's the case every year! As I write on Sunday, I'm very happy about the 1.75 inches of rain we've had this month. Friday morning it rained as I drove downtown for a meeting; I can't remember when it last rained in the morning.

My May garden was very happy as we received almost double our average precipitation during the first five months of the year. Our June temperatures were generally higher than average and precipitation was about average. We had two days of record highs – 93 degrees on the 19th and 92 degrees on the 20th.

July was a very difficult month for my garden. We had .33 in. of rain (average is .97) and it was very windy and hot. We experienced record highs of 90-91 on July 28-30. By the way, the highest recorded temperature in Alamosa was 96 degrees on July 5, 1989.

So what's going on in the garden? I try to keep ahead of the weeds, but it never happens. I've been pulling weeds, especially those that are going to seed. With the wet ground, it's pretty easy. Taller weeds are lamb's quarters (*Chenopodium album* – it is actually cultivated in some parts of the word and at Girl Scout camp we called it wild spinach; unfortunately, I don't like the taste), kochia (*Kochia scoparia*), and lavender, native asters (*Machaeranthera canescens* – I know some folks like these, and I like to see them growing along the highway, but they're too weedy looking for my garden. Shorter weeds are what we can pig weed (it's not amaranth and has little leaves and white flowers on longish stems), and purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*: some people eat this, but I don't like the texture. Once I had a cultivated Asian variety at a cooking class that did taste good and didn't have a slimy texture).

I have resorted to spraying bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*: native to Eurasia, it is a member of the morning glory family and has small white to pinkish flowers. By the first quarter of the twentieth century, it was proclaimed the worst weed in California) and dreaded white top (both tall *Lepidium latifolium* and low *Cardaria draba*). I've tried hard for years to just pull them, but they break off and seem to flourish when I do so. I don't remember seeing white top 10 years ago. Now, some vacant lots are totally covered with them.

My Shasta daisies (*Chrysanthemum maximum*), trollius (*Trollius*), delphiniums (*Delphinium*), and blue fleabane (*Erigeron 'Azure Fairy'*) all bloomed for a shorter time this year. I think it had to do with the heat and wind. The good news is I just deadhead them and they'll be back next year. During the summer when I cut back flowering plants, I leave as much green leaf as possible so the plants can make food and store energy.

Flower gardening isn't all work! I love picking bouquets throughout the summer and enjoy how the mix of blooms changes as the season progresses. Early bouquets are mostly daffodils and columbines. In early August I have larkspur (*Delphinium grandiflorum* 'bl butterfly'), Maltese cross, sea holly (*Eryngium*), Shasta daisy, gloriosa daisy (*Rudbeckia hirta*), phlox (*Phlox paniculata*), fleabane, hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle'), and sunflower. They don't seem to have been harmed by July weather. You can see images from our garden at AlamosaFlowers.net under the Flower Lists tab.

There are lots of aphids on our Virginia creeper and grape vine (I've never had grapes on the vine, but love the foliage that climbs over the trellis bench.). I believe the dryness and heat are responsible. If anyone out there has a good method for getting rid of aphids, please let me know.

"If you want to be happy for a short time, get drunk; happy for a long time, fall in love; happy forever, take up gardening." Arthur Smith