



How Many State Flowers Grow in Alamosa? Part 1

by Marilyn Loser

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The incentive for adopting state flowers was inspired during the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago. All states now have at least one state flower – I was surprised to find how many grow in Alamosa. Colorado adopted the Rocky Mountain Columbine (*Aquilegia caerulea*) in 1899. It was discovered in 1820 on Pike's Peak by mountain climber Edwin James. The Columbine's name derives from the Latin for columba, meaning dove.

Columbines grow very well in tended Alamosa gardens. Over the years, I've planted several of the dark lavender and white plants along with many other columbines of various colors. I have a few that have maintained the purple/white color while most are mixed pink, yellow, white, red, blue, and dark purple.

But columbines aren't the only state flower that grows in Alamosa; there are about a dozen others. Two of my favorites are Peony (*Paeonia*), Indiana's state flower, and Mock Orange (*Philadelphus lewisii*), Idaho's state flower. Peonies have huge, voluptuous flowers that bloom in late spring. I've had mixed luck with them. My best plant had to be moved and it didn't recover. They also don't like to be planted too deep. So if you have a garden where dirt blows in, you need to occasionally remove any built-up dirt. When walking around Alamosa I sometimes see a nice peony in a garden that hasn't been tended in years – makes me crazy! I try not to try too hard. According to proflowers.com, the peony has been growing in its native China, as well as in Japan and Siberia, for more than 2,500 years.

The small shrub Mock Orange does very well in our garden. It's named in honor of Meriwether Lewis who wrote about it on his travels during the Lewis and Clark expedition. You wouldn't know it from looking at my specimen, but "Native Americans used its straight and strong branches to make arrows, pipes and combs," according to ProFlowers. While my shrub has beautifully scented small white flowers in spring, the branches are more gnarly and the shrub is 2 ½ feet high. It does well in a small bed surrounded by Meadow Anemone (*Anemone Canadensis*).

Several state flowers are very common in Alamosa: New Hampshire – purple Lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*), California -- California Poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*), Oklahoma -- Indian Blanket flower (state wildflower, *Gailardia pulchella*), Tennessee – Iris (*Iris*), Maryland – Black-eyed

Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), Kansas – Sunflower (*helianthus annuus*), New York – Rose (*rosa*), North Dakota/Iowa – Wild Prairie Rose (*Rosa arkansana*), Mississippi -- Coreopsis (state wildflower also called tickseed, *Coreopsis*), and Illinois, Rhode Island, Wisconsin, and New Jersey – violet (*Viola*).

I love Lilacs. Besides the beautiful, scented blossoms, I enjoy the dark green foliage all summer season. Once established, they take little care. However, they do need occasional watering. I've noticed some that have died in recent years around homes in Alamosa as people have stopped watering. Purple Lilacs seem to be the hardiest, but I also have some pink and white ones.

California Poppies and Indian Blanket flowers are abundant in our yard. The orange poppies are annuals that reseed each year. Not a great flower for bouquets, but lovely as a wave of color in the garden. Some folks carefully thin theirs – I don't and they seem to do fine.

Blanket flowers are considered tender perennials; this means they may not overwinter in our cold environment. I've had some that have come back for years and others pop up from seed each year. Their color varies from yellow to red; many have dark centers surrounded by a red ring and an outer yellow ring. I just learned they are also aptly called Firewheel. They are a great choice for a xeric garden. They are not picky about soil, though sandy and well-drained are best; they are drought tolerant and do well in hot, dry sunny locations.

For more information and photos of the flowers mentioned in this column, please visit AlamosaFlowers.net and click on the Flower Lists tab. After appearing in the Valley Courier, all columns are posted at the website.

Community Seed Exchange: Mark your calendar for the January 28 swap at Adam State's Nielsen Library from 1 – 3 p.m. "Share locally grown, non-hybrid seeds with your community. Bring snacks and stories to share!" reports librarian Mary Walsh in an email announcing the event. This annual event is co-sponsored by VEGI (Valley Educational Gardens Initiative) and Seed to Seed Library at Nielsen Library. Registration is not necessary and if you have questions, please call Mary at (719) 587-7174.