



## Dream Garden

by Marilyn Loser

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REMINDER: The 2018 Seed Exchange is Saturday, Jan. 27, from 2 – 4 PM at Adam State's Nielsen Library. It is hosted by the Valley Educational Gardens Initiative (VEGI). The event features local, non-GMO seed. Please bring seed you've grown if can. If you don't have any, don't worry. Folks are wonderful at sharing.

Snow is falling as I write. It's a great day to be inside, listen to the popping of the fire, and dream about gardening. I browsed the web to get some ideas on the subject and happened upon an article by Fran Sorin at the GardeningGoneWild.com website that had some good tips. Whether you're starting a new garden or working with an established garden, dreaming is important.

My favorite Sorin tips are "Imagine" and "Discover Your Deepest Desires". Imagine what type of garden you would like. She suggests not worrying about the 'how' at this point; don't let the fear creep in. She writes "Now is truly the fun part – let go and dream!"

Discover your deepest desires by pouring over gardening magazines/book, surfing the Internet, or closely looking at gardens in your area. Go with your instincts. What draws your attention? A very formal garden -- one in which everything is neat and tidy and in its place? How about a cottage garden – one in which flowers spill out onto pathways or find niches in places where you never planted them? Looking for a shady nook or an open, sunny expanse? Do you want lots of color? A variety of greens and texture? Will you spend time relaxing or entertaining in your garden? Or perhaps you plan to view it from a porch or through a window.

Once you've determined some of your desires, explore your community. Look closely at gardens and visit local garden centers. Find out what actually grows in your area. I still spend time each month during the growing season checking out Alamosa gardens.

After establishing a rough plan, let a bit of reality set in. Ask yourself how much time and money you want to invest in your project. Ask yourself if your dream will work in Alamosa! Clearly a tropical garden with palm trees and orchids won't work in the San Luis Valley! If the total plan seems overwhelming, break it down into pieces. You could start with planting some anchoring shrubs and trees since they take the most time to get established. Possibly you could start with one or two beds – maybe the area you plan to spend the most time in.

If your budget is limited consider planting seeds or asking friends if they have perennials or bulbs that need dividing.

Whatever you decide, your first priority should be the soil. Do you have good soil or do you need to add top soil or augment it with compost or soil conditioner? Don't skimp on this step! Our native soil (perhaps I should say dirt) is very alkaline and is low in nutrients.

Next, figure out your watering scheme. I know one lady who wants to water by hand with a hose so keeps her garden rather small. I, on the other hand, love drip or soaker irrigation. If you're just getting started, soaker hoses are relatively inexpensive and easy to install. However, my experience with Alamosa water is that they clog after a few seasons. My favorite drip system is Netafim. Mine has a drip every 12 inches. I've used Netafim in some beds for at least 20 years and not had a problem. Most of our yard is watered automatically using garden timers. I love them!

How much water will you use? With our arid climate, you need to irrigate any successful garden. I'll address watering needs in a future article. However, if you want to be frugal with water, make sure to buy appropriate plants. Another tip is to group plants according to their watering needs. I have a couple of beds that require little water while a few others require regular, moderate water.

You also might want to consider plantings so that you have blooms throughout the season. If you're new to the area, I suggest you check out the "Hardy Garden" tab at [AlamosaFlowers.net](http://AlamosaFlowers.net). To see how our garden looks throughout the season, check out the "Our Garden" tab at the website. I just posted photos from 2017. All photos on the website are of our garden; not photos from catalogs of how the flowers 'should' look.

Whether you're starting anew or wanting to revamp a garden, now is the time to dream!

*"To perceive freshly, with fresh sense, is to be inspired."* Henry David Thoreau