



It's Been Dry - So What's Greening & Popping Up?

by Marilyn Loser

2018 May 2

REMINDER: Tree planting this Friday at noon and 4 pm. Please join the Alamosa Tree Board and Department of Parks & Recreation in planting trees along State Avenue north of the airport near the cemetery entrance. Thanks to a Colorado Tree Coalition/Excel grant and City funds we'll plant 10 trees appropriate for thriving underneath power lines. We'll shovel and learn!

It was a very dry winter, but not a particularly cold one, followed by a dry and windy spring. I toured our garden during the third week of April before we began watering to see what was happening. You might wonder why I'm discussing this now after many folks have started watering. I wanted to know what prevailed given the recent challenging weather conditions. I knew it would help me determine what plants I would continue to grow in the future. Sadly, I think it likely that we'll have drought and windy conditions into the foreseeable future.

In some of the more arid parts of our yard the following shrubs were blooming: forsythia (*Forsythia*), buffalo berry (*Shepherdia argentea*), and single/double flowering almond (*Prunus tenella* & *Prunus triloba*).

My three specimens of Arnold's bush honeysuckle (*Lonicera tatarian* 'Arnolds Red') already had dark green leaves as did my Peking cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster lacutifolius*). I love the cotoneasters with their early green leaves but find them unusual in two ways. They are very slow growing in our yard (ours are about 2 ½ ft high after 10 years!) and are the only berry-producing shrub in the garden that animals never touch.

Putting on leaves were golden currant (*Grossulariaceae*), woody fern bush (*Chamaebatiaria millefolium*), and wild shrub rose (*Rosa* ?). My Amur maples (*Acer ginnala*) were also putting on leaves. I'm not sure how to categorize them. Mine are definitely shrubs, but I know some people's are small tree-sized.

I highly recommend all of these shrubs.

I was starting to see some flower color during that April week. I always have various low daffodils and jonquils (*Narcissus*) bloom in late March or April along with grape hyacinth (*Muscari*). Since they are bulbs, I water them thoroughly in the fall anticipating they'll make it through the winter even without much additional moisture. Since my yard is very windy due to its location on the west side of town with open lots to the west, I plant spring bulbs with short blooms so they're less damaged by the wind. In my flower beds with rich soil they did very well this year. Those in more sandy, less rich soil still bloomed

but were smaller. Actually, they're all still blooming now.

Creeping lavender phlox (*Phlox stolonifera*) was blooming in a bed that is next to the house and below the sidewalk level. It's often my warmest and earliest bed. Johnny jump-ups (*Viola tricolor*) were doing just what their name says all around the yard. I do love them, but have to consistently pull them up from gravel walk ways. I have one friend who considers them weeds and gets rid of them. I did buy the first plants – that was probably 1,000 plants ago!

Lots of flowering plants were starting to pop up or green up– it's just too early for them to make a grand showing. I loved seeing old favorites blue flax (*Linum lewisii*), wild geranium (*Geranium caespitosum*), columbine (*Aquilegia species*), autumn joy sedum (*Sedum telephium 'Autumn Joy'*), hens and chicks (*Sempervivum*), and oriental poppies (*Papaver oriental*).

Most of these I've had in my garden for many years so are well established. The first few years take more constant watering and care. I have a casual cottage garden so usually let the flowers grow where they want as they reproduce through seeds and rhizomes.

I believe any beautiful flower garden in Alamosa needs supplemental water and good soil. However, some species need less water after they are established. Keeping the soil healthy is an ongoing process; I'll cover my tips in a future column. You can read more about these plants at the AlamosaFlowers.net website under the Flower Lists tab. No ads!

“Stay grounded,” as one friend wrote me in response to my complaint about the wind! It's warming up and time to be outside.

“There is no spot of ground, however arid, bare or ugly, that cannot be tamed into such a state as may give an impression of beauty and delight.” Gertrude Jekyll