



## Drought, Weeds, and Dismay?

by Marilyn Loser

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We've certainly been in drought conditions since last October. We've had less than one-half of our average precipitation since then (actual 1.61 inches; average 3.83). Combine low precipitation with mostly higher than average temperatures and lots of wind and you get compromised gardens and lawns. I don't water over the winter since I'm not fond of frozen pipes.

I lost a fair number of perennials in my rock garden and a beautiful Canada red chokecherry tree we've had for five years. The rock garden gets quite a bit of wind and covering it with leaf mulch wasn't enough to protect many roots over the winter. Hens and chicks (*Sempervivum tectorum*), a wild artemisia (*Artemisia* sp?) from the foothills outside of Gunnison, creeping thyme (*Thymus serpyllum*), creeping Veronica (*Veronica oltensis*) and oak-leafed sedum (*Sedum hybridum*) survived quite well.

I've added more rocks and replaced dead plants with healthier cuttings from other parts of the yard. Mostly I added lavender creeping phlox (*Phlox stolonifera*), snow-in-summer (*Cerastium tomentosum*), magenta geranium (*Geranium caespitosum* from dry foothills west of Alamosa) and more sedum. Rarely do I lose phlox or snow-in-summer. I think of them as very drought tolerant and I was dismayed.

The .56 inches of rain we had June 3 certainly helped. However, it also made the weeds very happy. To me, the worst weeds right now are the two species called white top (*Lepidium latifolium* and *Cardaria draba*) and field bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*). I try very hard to not allow white top to bloom – it produces huge quantities of seeds that have an amazing ability to germinate. Recently, you could see entire yards filled with the white blooms. Also it reproduces by roots and shoots. According to the Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA) website (<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/agconservation/noxious-weed-species>), “Root fragments as small as 0.5 inches can grow into new plants. A serious threat, pepperweed alters ecosystems by acting as a “salt pump” absorbing salts from deep in the soil. The plant then excretes the salt through the leaves and deposits it on the surface soil. Since most desirable plants do not tolerate high saline concentrated soils, the entire plant composition, and diversity of the area changes.”

Yesterday, as I drove around I noticed many lawns inundated with white or pinkish bindweed. Bindweed is in the morning glory family. At first glance, it might appear very pretty. The problem is it quickly takes over and is hard to eradicate. As the CDA website states, “Field bindweed is a non-native deep-rooted perennial that reproduces from seed and creeping, horizontal roots (rhizomes). Field bindweed stems are prostrate (grows low to the ground) and twining, and grow up to 6 feet long... seeds can remain viable in the soil for up to 40 years.”

I still struggle with lamb's quarters (*Chenopodium album*) and purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*). I know some folks actually like to eat these. I don't and I've tried any number of preparation techniques. I understand the purslane is very popular in Japan but I've also heard that the version that grows there is quite different from the invaders in my yard. I try to remove both of these before they bloom.

Kochia (*Kochia scoparia*), an annual, may be the most widespread weed in Alamosa, but it's not as troublesome to me as other weeds since it is easy to pull! Just don't let it grow to six feet high as it does in some places in town.

I'm hoping to finish up a weed page for the AlamosaFlowers.net website. Stay tuned for photos and more information.

It's not all about drought and weeds. I strolled around the yard a couple of days ago and counted 47 species of plants blooming in the yard. My dismay vanished. The list is posted at the Alamosa Flowers website.

May your flowers be many and your weeds few. And here's hoping we have less wind for the rest of the summer!

*"A weed is a plant that has mastered every survival skill except for learning how to grow in rows."* Doug Larson

*"Take care of your garden And keep out the weeds, Fill it with sunshine, Kind words and kind deeds."*  
Longfellow