



Plant Atmospheric Cooling Devices

by Marilyn Loser

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A tree by any other name? I recently attended the “Trees, People, and Towns Conference” in Windsor [south of Ft. Collins] that drew folks from Wyoming, Nebraska, and South Dakota, as well as from Colorado. Keynote speaker Paul Ries, president of the International Society of Arboriculture board of directors talked about “Communicating, Connecting and Engaging People with Urban Forestry.” I talk a lot about trees and perhaps assume people treasure them as much as I do. Perhaps a better approach would be to take the opportunity to appeal to the need for trees in each one of us.

A case in point: anyone around here been hot lately? Has Alamosa been the “Land of Cool Sunshine” in recent years? Sadly, I see more and more homes with no trees and even no landscaping. I don’t consider weed-strewn rocks to be landscaping.

Are those folks roasting in their abodes? Do they have some form of electrical air conditioning such as a swamp cooler? I know one lady who visits the park across the street from us every other day or so to escape her hot apartment that has no air conditioning. Most people I know in Alamosa don’t have air conditioning. This summer we are using a small swamp cooler that is mounted by an open window during the night. While our house is very well insulated and we open up at night and close in the day, it is a lot hotter this year since we had to cut down an over-grown, sick ash tree just west of our home last fall. It makes a big difference. Fortunately, we have other trees in the yard that are producing shade.

Do people really seek shade? Perhaps not in their yards, but consider parking lots. I know I look for a shady parking spot while cruising a parking lot and I’m not the only one as those spots are the first ones taken. What about you? Are you happy parking in the hot sun?

We have a lot of parking lots in Alamosa with no landscaping shade. As reported by National Public Radio in an article by Richard Harris, “Pavement ... stores heat during the day and makes cities hotter at night. And as cities heat up, air conditioners run harder. Their exhaust heat also pushes up the temperature.” He says cities “tend to be heating up at double the rate as the rest of the planet.”

Greg Levine, with the nonprofit Trees Atlanta (Georgia) says, “A thick canopy of trees can easily drop air temperature by 20 or 30 degrees, compared with a paved parking lot.” I realize we are not as hot as Atlanta or Phoenix, Arizona, but we can learn from them as our summer temperatures rise.

Compounding the heat issue is the drought. As you know, Alamosa is asking citizens to voluntarily water only 1) between 10 a.m. and after 6 p.m. and 2) essentially every other day with some caveats. Odd numbered addresses should water on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday and even number addresses on Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday. As reported in the Alamosa Courier, “Exceptions include vegetable

gardens, new plantings on the day of planting, essential turf subject to heavy public use and establishment of new turf from seed or sod (up to 21 days.)”

The goal is to reduce residential water usage. Sadly, this is a very challenging year to start this enterprise. We’ve had only 1.42 inches of precipitation this year. Last year we had almost four times as much precipitation to date (5.61 inches). While last year was a high water year for Alamosa, this year we’ve had only half of our average precipitation.

I know I talked about parking lots, but the same principle applies to shade for our homes. A future article will discuss how we can plant and maintain a tree or two to provide shade without overusing water, time, and money.

“The planting of a tree, especially one of the long-living hardwood trees, is a gift which you can make to posterity at almost no cost and with almost no trouble, and if the tree takes root it will far outlive the visible effect of any of your other actions, good or evil.” George Orwell