



Alamosa Landscapes

Got plant allergies? What to plant

by Marilyn Loser

2019 April 17

Reminder: PLEASE HELP PLANT TREES IN ALAMOSA this spring:

April 22, 4 pm: Earth Day. Help plant 5 apple trees at the Alamosa Community Garden west of Boyd school.

April 27: Rio Grande Farm Park – check their website for times RioGrandeFarmPark.org.

May 11, 10 am: Please help plant trees at the new Alamosa Recreation Center Pavilion by the parking lot. These trees will provide shade and a windbreak.

May 14, 4:30 pm: Alamosa Cemetery entrance on State Avenue. Help complete the evergreen entrance to the cemetery.

May 15, noon: Alamosa Cemetery entrance on State Avenue Help complete the evergreen entrance to the cemetery.

Do have allergies starting up this spring? Right now the main culprits are probably trees, not the few flowers that are around. Excuse me, achoo! Tree pollen is the cause. The purpose of male pollen is to pollinate female plant parts. “If this takes place within the scope of the individual tree (that is, there are separate male and female components contained within the same plant, in which case the plant is dubbed ‘monoecious’), but, other times, a species will have separate male and female plants. These species are referred to as being ‘dioecious’, ” says Marianne Lipanovich of Houzz.com.

It is not usually the showy spring flowering trees that are triggering your allergies reports Marie Iannotti of TheSpruce.com website. Most of those have heavy pollen and their flowers attract insects for pollination while the problem trees rely on light pollen distributed by the wind. And as we Alamosans know, we have plenty of spring wind.

You can avoid pollen issues if you purchase female plants of dioecious species. These include juniper (*Juniperus*), aspen (*Populus tremuloides*), cottonwood (*Populus*), and boxelder (*Acer*). Pines (*Pinus*) are mostly monoecious and don’t tend to cause allergy problems.

Looking ahead to flower season, there are a lot of flowers that can cause allergies. Daisies (*Leucanthemum*), especially oxeye daisy (*Chrysanthemum leucanthemum* – these are on the Colorado no-sale list as they can take over in some environments) which are related to ragweed, notoriously known to torment hay fever sufferers. Lipanovich suggests planting tall phlox (*Phlox paniculata*) as a more allergy-friendly choice. I haven’t had much success with white or pink

phlox, but lavender phlox does very well here and blooms a bit later than oxeye daisies. It has a long bloom time if you deadhead.

I didn't realize until researching this column that common sunflowers (*Helianthus annuus*) are allergy triggers. According to Lipanovich both the pollen and the seeds can cause problems. She suggests looking for pollen less or hypoallergenic sunflowers such as the cultivars 'Apricot Twist', Infrared Mix', or 'Lemon Éclair'.

Baby's breath (*Gypsophila*) is popular in cottage gardens and florist bouquets and its little flowers can pack a big punch of pollen. Also, some feel the odor is more reminiscent of another part of a baby's anatomy than the breath! Fall asters (*Asteraceae*), although not wind pollinated, are late-season bloomers and can be irritants that extend the allergy season well into the fall.

So what are some of the best flowers for allergy sufferers that do well in Alamosa? Iannotti suggests clematis (*Clematis*), columbine (*Aquilegia*), geranium (*Pelargonium*), iris (*Iris*), pansy (*Viola*), peony (*Paeonia*), petunia (*Petunia*), rose (*Rosa*), snapdragon (*Antirrhinum majus*), and verbena (*Verbena*).

If fact, these flowers are pollinated by insects so attract pollinators to your garden. So while rich in nectar and pollen, their pollen is usually heavier and perhaps stickier and doesn't tend to be windblown.

This column marks 10 year that I've been writing columns related to Alamosa trees and flowers! All columns are available online at AlamosaTrees.net or AlamosaFlowers.net. I started the columns after I joined the Alamosa Tree Board. One of the goals of a tree board is community education and I thought these columns would help. I specifically relate each column to Alamosa since we have a challenging growing environment -- cold winters, high altitude, low moisture, and frequent big swings in daily temperatures. Thanks for reading!

"We have not inherited the earth from our parents; we have borrowed it from our children." L. Brown