



Flowers are off to an early start.

by Marilyn Loser

2012 May 23

White blooming shrubs are now on display around Alamosa as spring flowering continues to be spectacular and early. Snowmound Spirea (and other varieties), shrub honeysuckle, Nannyberry, and Saskatoon (service) Berry are in full bloom and Canada (choke) Cherries are just finishing. I was asked if the Canada Cherries are messy. I have a couple that produce little cherries, but I've never eaten one. Birds feast on them before they're ripe; hence, I've never had a mess.

White flowers also are popping up: Lilies of the Field, dreaded Whitetop or hoary cress (on the Colorado noxious weed list B) and Oxeye Daisy (on the Colorado noxious weed list B). According to the Colorado Department of Agriculture website, species on list B shouldn't be allowed to spread, but for which there is not a single statewide plan. Local governments have a say in the management plan.

Whitetop (*lepidium draba*, formerly *cardaria draba*) is invading Alamosa. I don't remember seeing it until the last 6 years in my garden. Where there used to be just dirt along some roadsides and in empty lots, there's a bounty of whitetop. If you look at it up close, the little flowers of the western Asia and eastern Europe native are quite pretty. In fact I heard it was introduced to the United States by someone who liked the flowers. However, Wikipedia says, "[it was] introduced by contaminated seeds in the early 1900s."

What makes it particularly bad is its ability to reproduce both by horizontal creeping roots (that can be hard to pull) and by seeds. According to the CDA one plant can produce from 1,200 to 4,800 seeds. Get rid of them NOW before the seeds disperse! Whitetop tends to go dormant in the hotter summer months.

I have some Oxeye Daisies in my yard – they with a transplanted clump of desirable daisies. They're not as much a problem in Alamosa as they are in other parts of the state where they compete for rangeland and form dense populations reducing plant diversity and pasture forage. They were introduced from Europe as an ornamental and a seed contaminant according to the CDA.

Of course, many beautiful, non-invasive flowers are gracing our city. Colorado's state flower, the lavender and white columbine (*aquilegia caerulea*), is beginning to show up. Adopted as the state flower in 1899, the General Assembly acted to further protect the flower in 1925 by prohibiting digging or uprooting the flower on public lands and limiting the gathering of buds, blossoms and stems to 25 in one day.

Iris are starting to come out. The San Luis Valley's climate is ideal for the tall, voluptuous, bearded varieties. In the spring, I check out the rhizomes to make sure the tops are exposed or just under the surface. I've taken the advice of gardeners to plant them in slightly acidic soil. A couple of gardeners I know prefer iris to roses.

Some of the more hardy and easy to grow perennials that are beginning their blooming season are Icelandic Poppies, Midnight Sage, penstemon, various dianthus, and 'wild' yellow/ red roses.

I've already been planting perennials and some annuals in the garden. Before planting, I let them sit outside in a protected spot for a couple of days to adjust to the outdoor environment after being pampered in a greenhouse. Typically the end of the first week of June is considered to be our last frost date, but those who've gardened here for years knows it varies widely.

Most of my soil is in pretty good shape after years of bringing in top soil and mixing in compost. However, I still mix in a handful of soil conditioner and some seasoned compost when I add a plant to the garden.

Happy gardening! Check out AlamosaFlowers.net for photos of flowers that have been successful in our Alamosa garden.

"To pick a flower is so much more satisfying than just observing it, or photographing it ... So in later years, I have grown in my garden as many flowers as possible for children to pick." Anne Scott-James