



## Self-sowing Flowers

*by Marilyn Loser*

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I've talked with quite a few gardeners who are planting more perennials in order to avoid the cost and hassle of replanting annuals each year. I'm certainly in this category. However, I think many people overlook the joy and beauty of flowers that self sow. For these flowers, I don't have to worry about planting times or seed depth -- the flowers take care of the whole process.

Self-sowing varieties include annuals, perennials and biennials (flowering plants that have a two-year lifecycle and usually only bloom the second year). If you're a meticulous gardener and only want plants to bloom where you put them, this approach is not for you! For details on the flowers listed below visit the flower index tab at [AlamosaFlowers.net](http://AlamosaFlowers.net).

I have a symbiotic relationship with much of my garden. For example, I love annual, orangey California poppies and carefully planted them in a location where I thought they'd prosper. 20 years later, there are no poppies in the original spot, but they flourish in many other locations around the yard and I love it. I only pull them out if they encroach on an area where I don't want them.

This also works with other annual poppy species (pink and red Shirley poppies and giant pink peony poppies), and short-lived, early spring blooming perennial yellow and orange Icelandic poppies.

Other annuals that reseed well include yellow and orange African daisies, purple and pink larkspur, orange calendula (known by the English as pot marigold), sunflowers, showy golden eye and cosmos daisies. I'm not a fan of reseeding marigolds as they often return as a spindly, pinched version of the original.

When I was thinking about this column, I walked around the garden and realized that most of my self-sowing plants are perennials. My all-time favorite is columbine -- hey, I live in Colorado and the blue columbine is our state flower! During the first years of Alamosa gardening, I planted quite a few columbines. I haven't had to replant in at least eight years -- they've naturalized around the yard and I have a wide variety of colors.

Tied for second place are Missouri primrose with its lovely yellow blooms and medium high delphinium 'blue butterfly'.

Another Colorado native that does well for me is penstemon in both blue and pink. Dependable favorites include sea holly -- a smaller version of the purple globe thistle, edelweiss -- think "Sound of Music", blue

flax – an early morning treat, Maltese cross – red blooms that do best at the back of the border as their bottom leaves turn brown, and snow in summer – a grey-leaved ground cover with small white flowers in early summer.

Others I highly recommend are clustered bellflowers – short, erect plants with purple blooms, gloriosa daisies – a showy relative of the wild black-eyed Susan, creeping baby's breath in both white and pink – a very xeric plant once established, and yellow/red blanket flowers.

Two biennials grow in my garden. Blue and pink blooming Canterbury bells produce a low, wide base the first year and flower the second. A few pansies also appear each year.

There are a few more re-seeders I recommend with caution. I love golden trollius, but it needs a fair amount of water – not a good specimen for a low-water garden. I have one flower bed that gets more water than other beds and I have several thirsty plants in it. Perennial cornflower with its magenta blooms and deeply notched leaves adds a nice burst of color in June, but it does turn messy if not trimmed back.

I also like white bouquet tansy with its dainty white flowers – however, I don't like the odor so it's planted well away from the house. Low golden rod has a delightful yellow flower, is good for the xeric garden, but can become invasive if there's much water around.

Most of us would like well-behaved flowers. Those that reseed should do so gently and not become invasive! However, that's often not the case. Depending on Mother Nature has some drawbacks. I find myself yanking out excessive plants in some spots and scratching my head wonderingly when plants don't come back where I expected them. All in all, I love the process.

I deadhead flowers early in the season to prolong blooming. Later in the season I let the seeds develop. Some I let self-sow and others I gather to share with others or to try in a different location where the wind doesn't take them.

*"In my garden there is a large place for sentiment. My garden of flowers is also my garden of thoughts and dreams. The thoughts grow as freely as the flowers, and the dreams are as beautiful."* - Abram L.

Urban