



What's Blooming in the Drought?

by Marilyn Loser

2013 July 10

After walking around my garden this morning I took a trip down memory lane and looked at garden photos from previous years. Some old favorites appear year after year while some past favorites are in short supply this year or missing altogether. But, there are also wonderful surprises!

In the last few years I've made a conscious effort to use less water in most of our garden beds. Reduced irrigation combined with our ongoing drought, high summer temperatures, and hot winds have had an effect. We had only 1.61 inches of precipitation in the first half of 2013 and .50 inch of it fell on June 30. Also, 18 of the record-high June temperatures occurred since the turn of the century.

Sadly, most of the flower seeds I planted this spring didn't make it. Many germinating seeds need to stay damp until they can get some roots and initial leaves growing. Next year I'll start them in the greenhouse and put out plants – young plants should have a better chance of surviving.

On the bright side, the white meadow anemones that I've let take over one bed look very lush and purple May night sage looks the same year in and year out. Short, bright yellow golden rod doesn't seem to be adversely affected either. By the way, golden rod's bad reputation as causing allergies is unjust. According to Wikipedia, "The pollen causing these allergy problems is mainly produced by ragweed, blooming at the same time as the goldenrod, but is wind-pollinated. Goldenrod pollen is too heavy and sticky to be blown far from the flowers, and is thus mainly pollinated by insects."

Blue and pink penstemon did very well this year, although they bloomed for a shorter time than usual. I'm in the process of deadheading them in the hopes they'll re-bloom in August. Yellow Missouri primrose finds spots between flagstones and reseeds itself just fine and doesn't take over a bed.

Red, pink, and white annual Shirley poppies are less abundant this year and purple, clustered bell flowers (*Campanula glomerata*) are much shorter. Red yarrow bloomed as usual this year, but tall yellow varieties of yarrow are much shorter and they seem to have fewer buds. By the way, I NEVER buy any seed mixes that contain white, common yarrow (*Achillea vulgaris*). To me, it is vulgar! Once upon a time I had some, but it spread rapidly, elbowing out nicer flowers. It produced a deep maze of intertwining roots that took me five years to eradicate completely. I'm happy that I haven't had a white yarrow sighting in 10 years.

Various members of the carnation family (*Dianthus*) continue to come back each year, but haven't spread as much as I'd like. The varieties in my yard have small pink, white, magenta, and red blooms and range from 4 – 10 inches in height. These are not the carnations from the florist!

Ground covers such as snow-in-summer, dragon's blood sedum, and oak-leaf sedum are doing well in most areas but have disappeared from some sandy, quickly draining areas of the garden. Lupines are all but extinct. I think they need more regular water. Even though I planted them next to an emitter, they never returned.

I do have one garden bed that gets more moisture than the rest of the yard and is protected from the wind by a tall fence. However, delphiniums that used to grow to 6 feet in profusion barely make it until the next year. I don't know why and I miss them very much. It's true that the wetter garden is more shaded than in the past due to a maturing ash tree -- but it still gets a lot of sun. If anyone has any ideas on how I can better grow delphiniums, please let me know (Marilyn@AlamosaFlowers.net).

In the wetter garden, red Maltese cross, blue fleabane, Icelandic poppies, and yellow-orange trollius are doing well. I haven't seen trollius in many gardens around the valley and it's one of my favorites. Take a look at its photo (and all the flowers mentioned in this article) on the Flower List tab at AlamosaFlowers.net. All of the photos are of our garden, so aren't catalogue images of how a plant should look.

I still love to garden and if it's too hot and windy I go inside and re-emerge in the cool morning or quiet evening and my garden faith is restored. A garden is never a completed project. Rather, in the words of Ruthie Brown, "Gardening is a process."

"Flowers always make people better, happier, and more helpful; they are sunshine, food, and medicine to the soul." Luther Burbank