



Tall Flowers and Hardy Shrubs

by Marilyn Loser

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Take a look around your garden. Do you still have a lot of color? The pots in my garden are overflowing with petunias, nasturtiums, pansies, and geraniums. I think they did especially well this year as we didn't have a late killing frost and I watered them extra carefully early on as we had windy, dry, and hot days. And we've (meaning the airport) had about 3.5 inches of rain since the last day of June.

What about late-season blooming perennials and reseeding annuals? Dave Salman of High Country Gardens says, "Many folks think of spring as the peak color season in their gardens... As the growing season stretches into summer, many gardens become very green with few flowers in sight."

Late summer flowers have a lot to offer. And they're often much taller than early season bloomers. These plants have more time to develop their leaves and flowers. Around Alamosa two obvious standouts are sunflowers (*Helianthus* - annuals) and hollyhocks (*Alcea rosea* - perennials). Both are great reseeds in my garden. I occasionally yank some out when they interfere with my basil or tomatoes.

Hollyhocks do well in many Alamosa gardens. I've seen some stunning displays this year with plants towering over six feet high. I'm not sure how these gardeners do it! Mine tend to be shorter. However, I do well with the shorter relatives, dwarf white and pink hollyhocks (*Sidalcea* hybrid)

Gladiolas and dahlias are looking good around the valley. I saw a dinner-plate sized dahlia last week in Monte Vista. Ardent gardeners carefully dig up these bulbs in the fall; store them in a cool, dark and dry environment over the winter; and replant them in the spring. It's a lot of work so I enjoy the efforts of others! However, I've had good luck with the reseeding annual, pink Peony Poppy (*Poppy paeoniflorum*) when planted in full sun and good soil.

For more information on lavender and yellow late summer perennials, take a look at the August 15, 2012 column under the newspaper tab at AlamosaFlowers.net.

I've been adding more hardy shrubs to my garden over the last few years. Why? Because I'm becoming chronologically gifted. Once established, shrubs take less care than flowers beds. Two of my favorite shrubs are blooming now -- fern bush (*Chamaebatiaria millefolium*) and cinquefoil (*Potentilla*). Fern bush, with its white blossoms, does well in areas of the garden that are drier and sandier. I've found yellow flowering cinquefoils to be hardier than their white and pink blooming relatives.

In my garden, it seems most shrubs take three years to adapt. I follow guidelines for planting trees and dig the hole at least twice as wide as the root ball and place the top of the root ball even with the surrounding

soil. I create a water basin with a rim of soil and make sure to give it all the water it needs for the first three years.

Silver Buffaloberry (*shepherdia argentea*), Gro-Low Sumac (*Rhus aromatic 'Gro-Low'*), and Three-leaf Low Sumac (*Rhus trilobata 'Autumn Amber'*) are doing well. The buffaloberry has a silver hue and does well in poor soil. Mine is about three-feet high, but the literature says it grows 6 – 14 feet high. The Gro-Low Sumac is 2 feet tall and wide after 3 years.

My Three-leaf Low Sumacs are 8 – 12 inches tall and are spreading out. I had in mind a shrub that would act like a ground cover and it seems to be working. Much to my surprise, one specimen is already 5.5 feet wide. Gardening in the challenging environment of the San Luis Valley, I'm skeptical of published 'mature-plant size' claims. In this case the claim of a 6 – 8 foot spread is a reality and mine are overtaking garden paths. Oh well!

I'm fairly new to dogwoods. I saw some around town and had to ask the gardeners what they were. I have three now and they seem to be doing well, especially the Red-Osier Dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera 'Baileyi'*).

So what shrubs aren't doing so well? I've loved Silver Lace Vine (*Fallopia aubertii*) over the years. My first attempt lasted more than 10 years and was beautiful as it hid a wire fence. One spring it just didn't come back. I tried again and it lasted only two years. Granted, I planted it in an unprotected area. I will not plant it again.

I also have limited luck with Japanese Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*). I love the purple foliage and don't mind the barbs. They persist, but don't thrive. If you have a thriving barberry, please let me know how you care for it!

For photos and details visit AlamosaFlowers.net.

"If you would have a mind at peace, a heart that cannot harden, go find a door that opens wide upon a lovely garden." Unknown