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Better Earth Gardens in Kelowna staff member with water conservation information. The garden centre is one of several in the Okanagan who are partners in our Make Water Work program. (Contributed)

## Water diligence urged amid continued drought conditions in the Okanagan

Cooler temperatures are a welcome sight but extremely dry conditions remain

BARRY GERDING / Aug. 30, 2021 9:30 a.m. / NEWS



Cooler temperatures across the Okanagan Water Basin is welcome but the region still needs rain — a lot of rain — to subside the current drought conditions.

The Okanagan has been classified as a Level 4 drought rating (extremely dry) with the Vaseux Creek in the South Okanagan specifically elevated to a Level 5 (exceptionally dry).

When the drought level is sustained at those levels for weeks, adverse impacts on water supply, fish, agriculture, domestic use and wildfire suppression are almost a certainty.

Corinne Jackson, communications director for the Okanagan Basin Water Board, paying attention to due diligence of water use remains an important necessity.

“We are thankful for the cooler temperatures in helping to fight the wildfires, and it helps people less inclined to water their gardens so much when we are not suffering a major heat wave,” Jackson said.

“But there is still a lot of concern and we still need to conserve our water use.”

She said Okanagan Lake is not at full pool right now, and limited precipitation or snow this coming winter will create further environmental challenges if the streams and creeks which feed into the lake see a reduction in water flows.

Jackson said OBWB’s WaterWise program has two water preservation programs, one focused on local communities and another with individual resident pledges, that will wrap up in September. For more information about those programs, go to [makewaterwork.ca](http://makewaterwork.ca).

She said if extreme weather conditions, in particular drought conditions, experienced in the Okanagan over the past five years continue, she said it remains a wake-up call for local residents and civic governments to really think about what the landscape should look like.

She said deciding to pull up existing lawn and replace it with a rock covering is not a solution. It saves on water but the rocks become a heat collection source and it does nothing for carbon capture or putting out oxygen without plant greenery.

Both the xeriscape garden website and [makewaterwork.com](http://makewaterwork.com) offer alternatives of native and drought-tolerant plants that are better suited to our yards than water-needy vegetation like lawns and cedar hedges.

“They provide ecological benefits and require less water,” Jackson said of drought-tolerant vegetation.

She said rain barrels, another initiative promoted by OBWB in recent years, is also an effective way of collecting what precipitation we get to apply for garden use.