

Gardening with Nature

by Sigrie Kendrick

RIGHT PLANT IN THE RIGHT PLACE

Picking the right plant for your xeriscape garden

Sigrie Kendrick - Dec 21, 2022 / 11:00 am



Photo: Contributed

A drought-tolerant perennial ground cover suitable for shady spots such as under trees is *Lamium maculatum* 'Ghost' or Spotted Dead Nettle.

There are no absolutes in gardening. What I consider in some situations to be "garden thugs" are "landscape heroes" under other conditions.

It's vital that you plant the right plant in the right place when you plan your landscape and create a garden.

I have spent many hours ripping ground cover plants out of client's gardens where they have become overly enthusiastic—but under other conditions the same plants would be ideal.

For instance, in my previous column I discussed some of the challenges I saw when doing a recent site inspection for a strata council which was interested in converting a portion of the landscape to xeriscape.

I discussed poor pruning techniques and poor plant choices and was chastised by a colleague as being too negative. That was certainly not my intention.

There was a great deal of positive that came out of the meeting with the strata council.

The strata was interested in shade-tolerant ground covers to plant under existing mature conifers. I suggested they search our plant database at www.okanaganxeriscape.org and use the 26 search options available to narrow down to plant options that would thrive in the conditions present in their landscape.

Several of the strata members were unfamiliar with our plant database and were pleasantly surprised with how easy it was to navigate—even for self-professed non-gardeners.

In this instance, I suggested a trio of aggressive ground covers which could be successfully grown in the challenging conditions where so much moisture in the soil is taken up by mature tree roots.

I suggested an inter-planting of *Ajuga reptans*, *Galium odoratum*, and *Lamium maculatum*. Ground covers are exactly that: they cover ground quickly and can be successfully used as a living mulch to suppress weeds, while creating beauty.

The three suggestions can be considered 'thugs' if irrigated but are 'heroes' in less-than-ideal conditions. Planting the right plant in the right place is a recipe for gardening success.

Ajuga reptans 'Burgundy Glow', commonly known as Bugleweed, features scalloped, tri-colored foliage in shades of cream, rose and green and is covered in brilliant blue blooms in May and June.

Ajuga spreads by stolons or plant stems that behave like runners, taking root along the way and forming new plants. Reptans means creeping, and this forms a weed-suppressing mat-like ground cover.

Galium odoratum, also known as Sweet Woodruff features small, fragrant white flowers which appear in spring over dark-green lance-shaped leaves.

Both the blooms and the foliage are aromatic and so it is seldom browsed by deer.

Lamium maculatum 'Beacon Silver', Spotted dead nettle, features silver-gray leaves edged in green. *Lamium* has an extremely long bloom period with small hooded lavender flowers beginning in late spring and blooming sporadically throughout the growing season.

All of these ground covers are valued for their foliage interest which extends significantly past their bloom period with the light-coloured leaves of the *Ajuga* and *Lamium* lightening up the shaded area and contrasting nicely with the *Galium* leaves.

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The Okanagan Xeriscape Association is extremely grateful for the ongoing financial support of the Okanagan Basin Water Board and is proud to be collaborating on their Make Water Work campaign.

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