



Gardening with Nature

by Sigrie Kendrick

LEARN TO USE THE RIGHT PLANTS

Don't be a dinosaur—conserve water

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Photo: Contributed

Colourful and interesting landscapes, such as this fall view of a portion of the Okanagan Xeriscape Association's demonstration garden in Kelowna last fall, are what can be achieved while conserving water using xeriscape principles.

Next to our vital agricultural industry, outdoor landscapes in the Okanagan suck up the most water.

And there's no comparison when you consider which user is the most important. We can no more do without food than we can do without water. Unfortunately, the Okanagan is a near-desert and water is in short supply, a situation made much worse by climate change and the resulting extremes in weather, such as drought.

While attitudes are changing, wholesale buy-in from civic authorities, the development community, landscape professionals and nurseries, as well as those of us who plant and water our gardens and outdoor living spaces, is absolutely essential. No longer can we afford to be so irresponsible as to use plants that require large quantities of water to stay alive.

With that in mind, the Okanagan Xeriscape Association has joined forces with the Okanagan Basin Water Board, an entity in which every taxpayer in the region has representation, and its Okanagan WaterWise program to help educate the whole community about the importance of replacing water-thirsty landscapes with beautiful ones that require far less water.

When we obliterate natural landscapes to create buildings, and pave our grasslands and forests over with concrete and asphalt, we simply must re-plant at least some of that area with native-type plants which don't require large quantities of water to stay alive.

It's simplistic to believe because the bottom of our valley features a sparkling blue lake, water is not scarce. As soon as we begin to "mine" the lake—use more water than is replaced by natural precipitation each year—we are in big trouble.

The alternative is for all of us to wake up and give our heads a shake and to enact legislation requiring new developments, install landscapes that use the principles of xeriscape, insist that, as creators of subdivisions, home builders and home owners, our landscapes use drought-tolerant plants instead of lawn grasses, trees, shrubs and flowers that belong in a coastal rainforest.

To that end, OXA has organized a day-long workshop for professionals who work in civic parks and planning departments, those in the landscape industry and those working in nurseries to learn some basics about xeriscape.

Register now for this opportunity, Feb. 10 at the Coast Capri Hotel in Kelowna, by going to our [Eventbrite link](#). If you have questions, contact me at 778-363-8360 or email me at: exec_dir@okanaganxeriscape.org.

This intensive workshop cost \$165 and will run from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. It will feature a variety of expert speakers on topics such as the seven principles of xeriscape, the Long Grass movement in passive turf areas, native and xeriscape plant selection, soil and mulch, xeriscape design and maintenance, slope restoration and erosion control and irrigation and new products.

Please share this with anyone you know who wants to be on the leading edge of landscape maintenance and design.

Since OXA was created in 2009, it has had the support of the OBWB to help residents learn how to create colourful, attractive landscapes using plant materials that are appropriate for our Okanagan climate.

Its Make Water Work campaign partners with local government, First Nations, garden centres, irrigation suppliers and schools to educate residents about making water work more efficiently.

The OXA website has an extensive plant database where you can learn all about hundreds of plants which are suitable for this climate and help us conserve water.

As water costs and water restrictions increase, those on the leading edge of xeric landscaping will have the advantage over those who continue to stick to old-fashioned notions about the abundance of water in this valley.

Choose the sustainable path to our future and put money in the bank at the same time.

For details about xeriscape, go to our website at okanaganxeriscape.org

Follow us on social media for inspiration on the beauty that is xeriscape and consider submitting photos of your garden to director_smedia@okanaganxeriscape.org to be featured in our Share your Garden segment.

Sigrie Kendrick is a Master Gardener and executive-director of the not-for-profit Okanagan Xeriscape Association and can be reached at 778-363-8360 or by email at exec_dir@okanaganxeriscape.org.