



BENEFITS OF LONGER GRASS

Rest your lawnmower and let the lawn grow

Sigrie Kendrick - Mar 15, 2023 / 11:00 am



Photo: Sharon Spring, OXA

Egan Davis talked to Okanagan landscape professionals recently in Kelowna at an Okanagan Xeriscape Association workshop about the "Long Grass Movement" in passive turf areas. He suggests you give the lawnmower a break.

This spring, give your lawn mower a break.

You've got a valid excuse not to mow the lawn. There are lots of ecological benefits to letting turf grass grow long instead of shearing it short, including the fact it provides both food and habitat for beneficial insects such as bees, birds, snakes and other urban wildlife.

In passive turf areas, the concept of allowing the grass to grow long and co-exist with flowering plants provides support for pollinators such as bees as well as providing additional carbon storage in the ecosystem.

Whether you take the long step into creating a meadow, or just reduce the amount of mowing you do is up to you.

Also dubbed "No Mow May," the conservation initiative was one discussed by Egan Davis during his presentation to the recent Xeriscape for Professionals workshop held in Kelowna by the Okanagan Xeriscape Association.

"No Mow May" encourages homeowners to leave their grass and wildflowers long during the month of May. The initiative originated in Britain by the organization Plantlife, but has recently begun to gain traction worldwide.

Founded in 1989, Plantlife is an international conservation charity dedicated to conserving wild plants in their natural habitat and educating people about their benefits and beauty.

By keeping your mower in the shed for the month of May you are providing vital habitat and resources for bees and other emerging pollinators.

Multiple studies have shown that areas left un-mowed can contain double the population of broadleaf species and yield three times the nectar sugar of mowed areas. With the worldwide decline in pollinator populations this research gives us legitimate permission to leave our lawns long for the month of May.

Appleton, Wisconsin was the first U.S. town to adopt "No Mow May" in 2020.

Lawrence University did a study on the lawns of Appleton and found five times the number of bees and three times more bee species snacking on the un-mowed lawns.

Egan Davis is currently the parks operations manager for the City of Richmond and acknowledged the push-back from residents toward his "No Mow May" approach to turf management. But, he is emphatic that education is the key to changing people's perception towards long grass and a less-manicured esthetic.

Echoing Egan's sentiments is Chris Szymberski with Seed and Sparrow Landscape Design of Kelowna, who supports climate resilient landscapes. He says these landscapes can use significantly less resources and management energy.

At the workshop, Chris shared slides of a client's project that bore witness to the transformation from a traditional turf grass, water-thirsty and high-maintenance landscape, to a stunningly-beautiful natural space which allowed the aging clients to stay in their family home without feeling overwhelmed with maintenance challenges.

If you would like to see this design concept in-person, visit the pollinator garden located behind the Laurel Packinghouse on Ellis Street in Kelowna.

Jennifer Miles from the City of Kelowna discussed the many benefits of trees in urban areas, from slope stabilization to shade. One big benefit is that their shade helps decrease energy use in air conditioning during the hot Okanagan summer months.

She discussed the primary drivers of tree loss: development, safety, and pests, and how the city is implementing new bylaws aimed at root protection for mature trees on development sites.

It was a pleasure to hear from all of the presenters at the workshop and I came away from the day with a renewed sense of optimism that we can make positive changes in our approach to environmental issues.

Become a member of the Okanagan Xeriscape Association by visiting our website at www.okanaganxeriscape.org. Membership costs \$25 for individuals and \$40 for households and includes many benefits, all of which are outlined on our website. Memberships received prior to the end of March will be eligible to win one of two \$25 gift certificates to be used at our annual spring plant sale being held on May 6 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Wild Bloom Nursery, 840 Old Vernon Road in Kelowna.

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.

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