

## Gardening with Nature

by Sigrie Kendrick

### VENTURE INTO THE GARDEN

# It's officially spring, so it's time to plant

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Photo: contributed / Judie Steeves

*Nepeta racemosa*, Walker's Low Catmint, is a great host plant for pollinators, as these swallowtail butterflies prove.

Spring has sprung, finally.

Wow, was it just me or does this past winter seem to have been the longest ever?

Perhaps slipping on the ice at a neighbour's on Friday the 13th and breaking my ankle in two places and the subsequent six weeks in a cast and on crutches didn't improve my attitude, but this last winter seemed interminable.

After my period of immobility, it was a great pleasure to volunteer at the recent Seedy Sunday organized by the Okanagan Master Gardeners and to reconnect with gardeners and vendors alike after the long years of COVID-induced hiatus.

The Okanagan Xeriscape Association had a booth at the event with volunteers spreading the message of water conservation so that collectively we will have more water available with which to grow our own food.

Upwards of 900 people came through the door at the Parkinson Recreation Centre, all eager to purchase seeds and to talk about plants, edible and ornamental, and the collective mood was one of anticipation, joy and hope.

While all those purchased tomato, pepper, and basil seeds will have to wait for warmer temperatures, there are lots of what are known as "cool season" crops that can be planted now when we are still seeing nightly freezing temperatures. In fact, they perform best in the cooler temperatures of spring and fall.

Cool season crops include leafy greens—think lettuces, spinach, mizuna, Swiss chard, arugula, and mustard greens. With the current price for a head of lettuce hovering around the \$6 mark, why not consider growing your own?

Also happy in cool weather are crops harvested for their roots, such as radishes, onions, leeks, carrots, beets and potatoes.

The genus Brassica, commonly known as the cabbage and mustard family, performs best at cooler temperatures and includes broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, Brussels sprouts and turnips.

In addition to all of these edibles there are tons of ornamentals which benefit from a period of cold known as stratification, often mimicked by placing your seeds in the freezer for a few weeks.

Many of these ornamentals are also xeriscape plants so the benefits of including them in your landscapes are two-fold.

*Achillea millefolium*, known commonly as Yarrow, is an Okanagan native which has many cultivars—all of which are extremely appealing to a wide variety of pollinators.

The umbrel shape of the flower head makes for an easy buffet for them.

Joining *Achillea*, among others, are Siberian iris, multiple sedums, monarda, baptisia, and nepeta, all of which benefit from a cool start. When combined in your landscape they offer a strong showing of colourful flowers and support for pollinators throughout the season.

We are in the process of determining dates for the next xeriscape class, so check our website frequently for the latest information, at [www.okanaganxeriscape.org](http://www.okanaganxeriscape.org).

Join OXA before the end of March and you will be eligible to win one of two \$25 gift certificates to be used at our annual spring plant sale being held on May 6th from 10 a.m to 2 p.m. at Wild Bloom Nursery, 840 Old Vernon Rd.

Follow us on social media for inspiration on the sustainable beauty that is xeriscape.

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.

*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](mailto:exec_dir@okanaganxeriscape.org).*