

## LACK OF SNOWPACK IN B.C.

## Not a good sign as B.C. continues to dry out

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Photo: Contributed

Flammable plants, such as cedar hedging, are not recommended for planting in wildfire-prone areas such as the Okanagan. This illustrates how easily they go up in flames leaving everything nearby vulnerable to the fire. Our dry winter does not bode well for drought conditions next wildfire season.

From Whistler to Williams Lake there is no snow, where normally the ground is white at this time of year and recently, a bear was spotted in Glenmore, when bears normally would be curled up asleep at this time of year. Both are clear signs of climate change.

Over the holidays, I had the pleasure of staying with friends in Williams Lake. We had plans to snowshoe and go for a snowy winter sleigh ride, but the weather had other plans for us.

The plaid flannel shirts and big logging trucks were familiar but the landscape was just not right for the time of year. To add a historical perspective, my friends have lived there for more than 30 years and have never experienced a winter like this one.

Mount Timothy, the ski hill south of town, was closed because it had no snow to offer the setting for winter sports. I can't imagine what next summer's drought and wildfire season will be like if this continues.

The past year we suffered the most destructive wildfire season in B.C. history so it's not surprising to hear a lot of talk about the FireSmart program right now.

I recently drove up Westside Road, alongside Okanagan Lake, to visit a friend who moved there and was stunned by the devastation from both the White Rock Lake Wildfire in 2021 and, more recently, by last summer's McDougall Creek Wildfire.

It's one thing to see it on the news or social media and another thing altogether to see it in person.

The apparent randomness of the destruction was heartbreaking, with one home left standing while all the neighbours' homes were obliterated by the wildfire.

There are lots of simple, common-sense changes you can make to your home landscape that would help to make it FireSmart, including removing dead limbs from trees. These are called ladder fuels and they lead fire into the upper storey of a tree where the fire would burn hotter and higher. You can also use plant choices that are less flammable than, say, cedar hedges.

Many xeriscape plants are considered FireSmart plants because they are less flammable than others. In the case of the ubiquitous cedar hedge, it not only is a fire hazard, and can wick fire to your home if it grows adjacent to your house, it is also a heavy user of a scarce Okanagan resource—water.

There are a couple of very informative blogs on the Okanagan Xeriscape Association's website on alternatives to that cedar hedge. Go to the website at: [okanaganxeriscape.org](http://okanaganxeriscape.org) and click on our blog, On the Dry Side, then click on hedging alternatives under xeriscape plants.

Xeriscape and FireSmart trees which are planted in our Xeriscape Demonstration Garden and can be included in your new landscape are *Koelreuteria paniculata* (Golden Raintree) and *Gleditsia triacanthos* (Honeylocust). The *Koelreuteria* is an excellent small tree reaching nine to 12 metres with yellow flowers in the spring followed by interesting rust-coloured pods.

The *Gleditsia* is larger, also reaching nine to 12 metres and provides dappled shade with bright yellow fall foliage. FireSmart shrubs available for viewing at the garden are *Caryopteris x clandonensis* (Blue mist spirea) and *Physocarpus opulifolius* (Ninebark).

The *Caryopteris* is one of my favourite shrubs, as it offers late-season blue-purple blooms for pollinators and is an excellent colour contrast to so many of the warm fall shades.

The *Physocarpus* 'Amber Jubilee' is a relatively-new, smaller cultivar and features foliage which transitions from orange with yellow veining to deep purple in the fall.

We have a large number of FireSmart perennials for view in the garden in front of the H2O Aquatic Centre on Gordon Drive in Kelowna. Join us this spring to watch the seasons of beauty unfold there, and learn more about xeriscape plants by visiting our plant database at [okanaganxeriscape.org](http://okanaganxeriscape.org).

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

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