

SUSTAINABLE GARDENING

Sustainable gardening can help save the planet

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Photo: Contributed

Mulching plants with organic matter is one of the fundamental principles of sustainable gardening as well as a vital principle of xeriscaping, and a tenet of the Okanagan Xeriscape Association.

It seems to me not a day goes by without more terrifying statistics—stunning numbers on population growth coupled with a dangerously-low snow pack this year.

It really has me worried for this coming summer and beyond. What can we do? All of us can take small steps and make a difference. For instance, sustainable gardening has emerged as one way to combat the environmental challenges we face.

Sustainability is about meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Sustainable gardening principles would involve elements such as organically enriching the soil, conserving water, celebrating diversity, using integrated pest management practices, composting kitchen and yard waste and community involvement in activities such as sharing seeds.

Sustainable gardening focuses on minimizing environmental harm while promoting biodiversity and conserving resources. The aim is to foster a harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

- Soil health is a fundamental principle of sustainable gardening and a cornerstone of a successful garden. This includes using organic matter, compost, and natural fertilizers to promote soil structure and fertility while avoiding synthetic chemicals. By prioritizing soil health, sustainable gardeners contribute to long-term environmental stability and the vitality of the plants they grow.

- Water conservation is another key aspect of sustainable gardening. With water scarcity becoming a global concern, efficient water use in our gardens is crucial. Sustainable gardeners employ techniques such as drip irrigation and rainwater harvesting to reduce water consumption. Selecting drought-resistant plants suited to our Okanagan Valley's semi-arid climate not only conserves water but also supports the resilience of our ecosystem. There are hundreds of such plants on our plant database, with detailed characteristics of each, at www.okanaganxeriscape.org

- Diversity is celebrated in sustainable gardens, both in terms of plant species and wildlife. On the other hand, monoculture—the practice of growing a single crop—often leads to imbalances in ecosystems and increased susceptibility to pests. Sustainable gardens embrace biodiversity, which can naturally deter pests and enhance the overall health of the garden. The inclusion of native plants supports local ecosystems while providing vital habitat and food for wildlife.

- Integrated pest management (IPM) is an approach favoured by sustainable gardeners with acceptance that not all bugs are bad. Rather than relying on chemical pesticides, which can harm beneficial insects and disrupt ecosystems, IPM involves understanding the natural predators of pests and promoting their presence in the garden. This approach minimizes the need for harmful chemicals while maintaining a healthy balance between pests and their natural adversaries.

- Composting is a key practice in sustainable gardening that is all about waste management. By turning kitchen scraps and yard waste into nutrient-rich compost, gardeners close the loop on organic matter. Compost not only enriches the soil but also reduces the need for chemical fertilizers. This simple yet effective technique exemplifies the circular nature of sustainable gardening practices—all while reducing trips to the local landfill.

- Community involvement is an often-overlooked aspect of sustainable gardening. Sharing knowledge, seeds, and produce with neighbours fosters a sense of community and contributes to a more sustainable local food system.

Consider attending Seedy Sunday, March 10 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Parkinson Recreation Centre in Kelowna, to purchase seeds and pick up gardening tips from Master Gardeners.

You'll also have a chance to see the latest on offer from a wide variety of vendors. Community gardens, where individuals collectively cultivate and share their harvest, exemplify the collaborative spirit of sustainable gardening.

Sustainable gardening is an approach that goes far beyond the simple act of growing plants. It is a personal commitment to vital environmental stewardship which focuses on both the conservation of resources and the promotion of biodiversity.

By adopting the principles of sustainability in our own gardens we can collectively cultivate a healthier planet for future generations.

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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