



SAGEBRUSH NURSERY

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Gardening with Water in Mind



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According to the Town of Oliver website, we should be expecting a water utility bill in the mail sometime next year. So it's a good time to start thinking about how to reduce water use.

Did you know that toilets and landscape watering are the two biggest users of water in a house? In fact, studies in several cities have shown that, during the summer months, half of all household water use is for lawn and garden.

This is why we thought we could help homeowners with some water conservation gardening tips.

The first and most obvious water conservation measure is to decrease the size of your lawn, wherever possible. If you can shrink your lawn in half, or get rid of it altogether, then not only are you saving a lot of water, but you're also saving yourself long-term maintenance time and money. For those of you turf-lovers who absolutely can't do without the green stuff, we will also be giving some water conservation lawn tips in future columns.

What you replace the lawn with needs some thought and consideration. How much time do you want to spend on long-term maintenance? Do you want to continue to have plants as a cooling effect around your house or would you rather have rocks and colourful gravels? Do you want to attract birds,

butterflies, and other wildlife? How do you design your garden so that it has rich colours, a pleasing shape, and inviting gardening features? What about the cost of implementing this new garden? We'll be exploring these questions in this bi-weekly column.

It's xeriscape, not zeroscape!

I'm sure many of you have heard that funky word. In a nutshell, xeriscaping is water-efficient landscaping that's appropriate to the natural environment. The word is derived from the Greek word xeros, meaning dry.

The goal of xeriscaping is to create a visually attractive landscape that uses plants selected for their water efficiency.

A plant that's satisfied getting most of the water it needs from natural rainfall will require a lot less work from you. For water-thrifty perennials, choose varieties that are native to your area (or a region with a similar climate). These plants will be naturally adapted for your local climate and soils. For example, a plant that thrives on the coast will require lots of additional water in the much drier conditions of the Okanagan. But if you choose drought tolerant plants that naturally thrive in this arid valley, then they will do beautifully in your home landscape.

An established, properly maintained xeriscape needs about one-third the water of a traditional turf-based landscape. Some xeric plants require almost no supplemental watering once they are established.

Contrary to popular misconception, xeriscape does not mean rock and a cactus. The Okanagan has a wonderful variety of water-wise plants. Some of these plants are perfect for adding year-round greenery and texture. Other native plants are great for adding a splash of seasonal colour. A properly planned xeriscape can offer brilliant colour from April through October.

Before I wrap up for this week, let me also define 'native plant'. This term is normally used to describe plants that grew in a particular area before the settlement of European peoples. So to learn which plants are native to the Okanagan, one needs only to look at or take a walk in a low to mid-elevation Provincial Park in the valley. Alternatively, both the Osoyoos Desert Centre and the Nk'Mip Cultural Centre have excellent interpretive walking trails featuring native plants.

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