

Steele: Outdoor water use targeted

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At the annual general meeting of the Okanagan Basin Water Board held Sept. 5, guest speaker Deborah Curran (University of Victoria professor in environmental law and sustainability) ended her presentation on the new B.C. Water Sustainability Act by stating that the biggest pot of water available for future use in the Okanagan is what is currently used for urban irrigation.

Twenty-four per cent of all water used in the Okanagan goes onto residential landscapes. Indoors, we use seven per cent, while agriculture accounts for 55 per cent, golf courses five per cent, and parks and open spaces two per cent (www.obwb.ca/wsd/key-findings/water-use).

It is important to reduce that 24 per cent for two reasons – infrastructure cost and preserving water in our lakes and rivers.

In most of the Central Okanagan, residential irrigation water is the same treated drinking water that we use indoors.

The cost of our water will escalate as public health regulations for water purification become increasingly stringent, requiring more expensive treatment facilities.

As the pressure on our water supply increases through expanding population, increasing high temperatures and summer drought, current infrastructure will not be able supply enough treated water during peak irrigation use in the summer months.

In other dry areas of North America it has been proven that the most effective way to avoid building costly new water treatment plants is to enforce residential watering restrictions.

When this happens landscapes that have been created, or modified, to be prepared for drought and watering restrictions will thrive.



Conventional landscapes will be stressed as will the gardeners looking after them.

The Okanagan is the driest region of Canada, receiving an average of eleven inches of precipitation a year. If we are not careful we will use more water than the annual rainfall needed to replenish our lakes.

Okanagan water consumption is 675 litres of water per person per day compared to the Canadian average of 329 litres.

The excessive use all occurs during the months when we irrigate our lawns.

Now is a great time to start planning and working toward changing your current landscape.

Water-wise gardening (xeriscaping) can greatly reduce labour in the garden making it an enjoyable life-enhancing pastime for all ages rather than a dreaded chore.

Xeriscape landscapes are colourful and attractive. With the diversity of water-wise plant species available, almost any style of gardening is possible.

I invite you to attend my "Introduction to the Seven Principles of Xeriscape" class.

The principles of design and planning, soil improvement, practical turf areas, efficient irrigation, use of mulch, good maintenance, and

appropriate plant selection are illustrated with photos and an extensive handout.

There is practical information for making changes to an existing landscape as well as for creating a new landscape and for those who are new to gardening in the Okanagan.

The two night class is on Thursday, Sept. 18 and 25, or Wednesday, Oct. 1 and 8, from 7 to 9 p.m.

For more information and to register, go to the classes page at www.okanaganxeriscape.org or call 250-762-6018.

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