

# Spring into xeriscape



A colourful, interesting, drought-proof, xeriscape garden in Kelowna's North End.  
*Contributed*

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Replacing standard landscaping with xeriscaping can conserve 30 to 100 per cent of the water used on lawns and cedar hedging, says Lisa Masini, vice-president of the Okanagan Xeriscape Association.

She was speaking at the Okanagan Institute's weekly Express series on the topic Spring into Spring: Brave New Gardens.

"Sustainable gardening is in tune with the environment, yet you can have continuous bloom throughout the year," she said.

Xeriscape is about re-thinking what our normal landscapes look like. They're not just rocks and gravel, she added, but they are full of plants that are immune to the impacts of drought.

The Okanagan Xeriscape Association was formed last year as a non-profit society that aims to provide information on gardening with nature in an effort to conserve water. On its website, [www.okanaganxeriscape.org](http://www.okanaganxeriscape.org), there is now a plant database of hundreds of plants which have low water needs, including trees and shrubs, perennials and annuals.

There is also information about membership, upcoming classes for gardeners and workshops for professionals, such as the Friday, Feb. 26 Xeriscaping for Landscape Professionals at the Ramada Inn. Register on the website.

The association is also creating a demonstration garden at the new H2O Centre with help from the City of Kelowna and the Okanagan Basin Water Board's grants program, but more funds will be needed to complete it this spring, said Masini.

President Gwen Steele talked about xeriscape attitudes and ideas.

“Let nature be your guide,” she advised. When you take a walk in the wild, look at what grows together and mimic that palette in your garden.

The more diversity you have the more nature you’ll enjoy, and it’s even possible to purchase native plants at some nurseries.

In the wild, you’ll notice that mulches gather around plants, including dead leaves from last year’s growth. They help conserve moisture as well as providing nutrients to help feed plants and reducing maintenance such as weeding, she noted.

Mulching and efficient irrigation are two good water-saving techniques to use in a home garden, she said, while another big one is reducing the area of turf grass, which is a huge user of water.

Instead of using weed killers and fertilizers on your lawn, mulch it now with a layer of Odogrow or Nature’s Gold composts. That will provide the needed organic matter to feed the lawn as well as improving its water-holding capacity.

And then there are automatic irrigation systems. She recommended checking the automated irrigation system to make sure it’s not set in spring to put out enough water for the driest day in summer. Also check for leaks.

It should be set up in zones, and each zone should only be receiving the amount of water required by the group of plants in that zone.

Deep, but more infrequent watering produces healthier grass with deeper root systems which need less water to stay healthy.

Try reducing your lawn area by taking out a bit at a time, beginning with slopes where it’s hard to mow, under trees and areas where there are no activities that require grass, she suggested.

Instead, plant ground covers such as suggested in the association’s plant database, which require little to no water, many of which provide colour at some point in the year as well.

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