

NEWS

▼ XERISCAPING

Herbs for the water-wise garden

Several versatile herbs commonly grown in our food gardens are decorative enough for the flower border and are also drought-tolerant.

Some have survived the ultimate test in my sunny xeriscape garden.

It has very tough conditions: dry, nutrient-poor, sandy soil and tree roots that compete with plants for any rainfall.

Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) has thrived there for years.

I used its seedlings to fill in a challenging slope down to the street.

They flourish even though the plough dumps gritty snow on them every winter.

There are also variegated-leaf forms such as silver thyme (*T. 'Argentus'*) and Doone Valley thyme.

Not classed as edible



GARDENING WITH NATURE

Gwen Steele

herbs, creeping thymes are excellent in my garden.

Woolly thyme is a fairly rapid growing ground cover.

Elfin thyme, dense, and a slower-growing ground cover works well between flagstones, as does mother-of-thyme.

All these thymes are evergreen.

Another herb that self-seeded and has been useful along the street is hyssop (*Hyssopus officinalis*).

It's blooming now with white, pink, or blue flowers.

Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) also does very well. Variegated-leaf forms of grey and purple (*S. 'Purpurescens'*), purple, pink, cream and green (*S. 'Tricolor'*) and green and gold (*S. 'Icterina'*), add light and interest to the garden all season. Blue flowers are a bonus at the end of June.

Fatter-leaved than common chives, garlic chives (*Allium tuberosum*) have a garlic flavour.

Their beautiful flat heads of white flowers open late summer.

Although I have never planted it in the dry garden, dill frequently appears there and does well until harvested for potato salads.

Many lavender plants do well and add a year-round silvery presence.

One year I made lavender eye bags from the flowers for Christmas

gifts. Self-seeding annual calendulas add a bright spot of yellow and orange. Flower petals brighten up salads.

I just moved some golden oregano from a low-water garden into the dry garden. It will get hand-watered this year only, so next year will be the test.

The dry conditions will certainly slow its spreading habit.

Although I don't have it, French tarragon would grow in these conditions.

Other plants classed as herbs, but not necessarily edible, also thrive in my dry garden.

Catnip blooms from April to July and if cut back, blooms again. *Nepeta 'Walker's Low'* is a large form 30 inches high and wide.

Santolina, sometimes called lavender cotton, is

a sub-shrub with a shape similar to lavender.

It has striking, silver foliage year round, and button, yellow flowers in early summer. Foliage can be used as a moth repellent.

In early summer Rue (*Ruta graveolens*) has flat clusters of tiny yellow flowers atop its finely cut, attractive blue-green foliage. It may be a cat deterrent.

These herbs not only thrive without supplemental water, their aromatic foliage ensures that they are deer-proof.

Gwen Steele is executive director of the non-profit Okanagan Xeriscape Association. Learn more about Gardening with Nature and plants for the Okanagan at the website www.okanaganxeriscape.org.

Wetlands projects get \$160,000 in funding

Funding was approved for a trio of Okanagan Basin Water Board projects to lay the groundwork for a comprehensive water data collection program and valley-wide wetlands strategy.

"Good water management begins with good water measurement. The first step in preparing for floods or droughts is to know how much water is flowing in the streams. It's important information for residents and water man-

agers, for farmers, and for those concerned with fish," water board executive director Anna Warwick Sears explained.

Environment Canada has awarded \$30,000 to the water board to re-establish two strategic stream-flow hydrometric monitoring stations. "In this time of tight budgets, we have to share data to get the most value out of our combined efforts," said Warwick Sears.

Another \$95,000 has

been allocated by the Union of B.C. Municipalities' Gas Tax Innovations Fund to develop a single database where stream-flow measurements from across the valley can be collected and accessed.

Environment Canada also approved \$35,000 to create Phase 1 of an Okanagan Wetlands Strategy. The strategy includes compiling existing wetlands information, and establishing a steering committee to guide develop-

ment of a valley-wide protection plan.

Rick Simpson, co-chair of BC Wildlife Federation's Region 8 fisheries committee, said, "Wetlands are an important part of our aquatic eco-system, responsible for filtering out pollutants from our water, but they're often overlooked and now 85% are gone.

"Often they get drained or paved over. Instead, we need to protect what's here."

MOTORING

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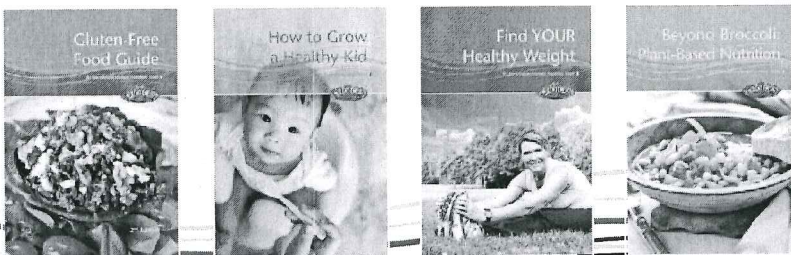
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