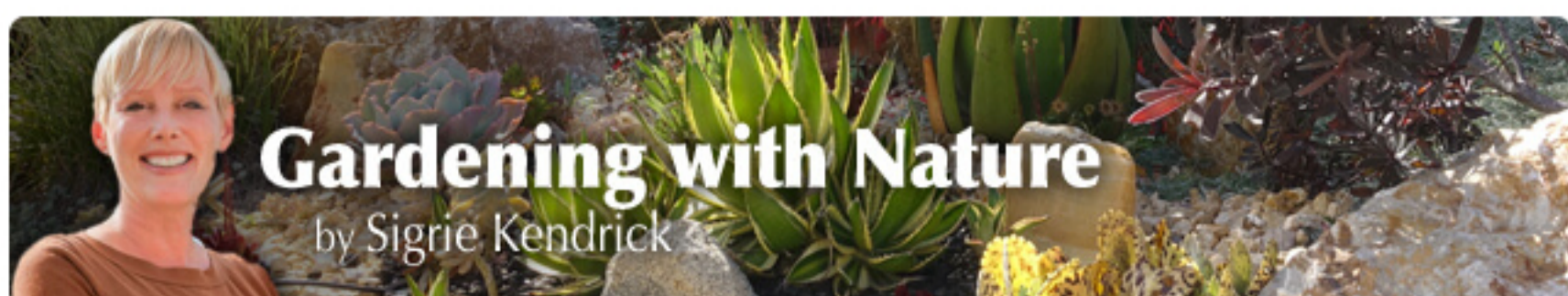




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Gardening with Nature

by Sigrie Kendrick

PLANNING YOUR PLANTINGS

Plant sale fundraiser to offer unique drought-tolerant plants

Sigrie Kendrick - Apr 26, 2023 / 11:00 am



Photo: Contributed

Gardeners enjoyed selecting plants for their xeriscape gardens at last year's Okanagan Xeriscape Association spring plant sale. This year's sale is set for May 6 in Kelowna.

It's plant sale time of year again.

With spring, everyone with an interest in growing is out looking for something different to try in their garden landscape—so plant sales are on the list of things to do.

The Okanagan Xeriscape Association is offering a variety of unique and unusual plants at this year's annual Spring Plant Sale on May 6 that are drought tolerant and beautiful as well. Some might even provide a substitute for that water-thirsty green lawn, with its exotic mix of grasses that are not very appropriate for the Okanagan's hot, dry climate.

Think: no more turf grass. A recent report from Agriculture Canada states the Kelowna and Vernon areas are in "severe drought" after receiving less than 10% of average precipitation in March.

According to Agriculture Canada this occurrence of severe drought is a once-in-10-year event, but it may become more common. Climate modelling predicts our Okanagan summers will continue to be longer, hotter and drier.

So, why do we continue to lay acres of thirsty turf grass on properties all over the valley when there are many drought-tolerant alternatives?

At this year's annual plant sale, OXA, in collaboration with Wild Bloom Nursery, is offering many lawn-alternative plants as we continue to encourage residents to reduce their turf areas and plant species more suitable to our semi-arid environment.

One of the lawn-alternative species we have been successfully trialing at the nursery is *Herniaria glabra*, known commonly as Rupturewort. This creeping perennial features dense foliage of small green succulent leaves which act as an excellent weed-suppressant and can tolerate heavy foot traffic.

The green foliage of *Herniaria glabra* transitions to shades of red and orange as the temperature drops in the fall, adding to its appeal. *Herniaria glabra* is hardy to Zones 5 to 9, so it is appropriate for planting in the Okanagan and can thrive in the poorest of soils.

This perennial prefers to be sited in full-sun or part-sun and, once established, will only require supplemental water during lengthy periods of drought.

Also available for purchase at the sale will be *Cerastium alpinum lanatum* or Alpine Mouse Ear.

This is not to be confused with the almost-invasive Snow-in-summer, *Cerastium tomentosum*. *Cerastium alpinum lanatum* is much better behaved. This alpine plant is native to the Arctic, hardy to Zone 3, and features fuzzy silver-grey leaves covered in a mass of starry white flowers in early summer.

Cerastium alpinum lanatum is tolerant of drought and poor soils but as with many xeric plants can suffer from root rot in heavy wet soils and will benefit from a mulch of pea gravel around the plants.

Another lawn alternative available for purchase will be *Thymus praecox* "Coccineus," Red Creeping Thyme.

This low-growing, mat-forming perennial is an excellent choice for a lawn substitute; drought-tolerant once established and can it weather moderate foot traffic.

Thymus praecox 'Coccineus' features fragrant dark-green leaves which are not bothered by browsing deer and it is covered with magenta blooms in early summer. The flowers of this perennial are attractive to a variety of pollinators.

Ideally, Red Creeping Thyme prefers a full-sun location but it will tolerate some shade and is not particular about soil conditions.

Our annual spring plant sale and primary fundraiser for OXA will go May 6 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Wild Bloom Nursery, 840 Old Vernon Road. A wide selection of xeric plants will be available for sale, a list of which will be posted on our website (www.okanaganxeriscape.org) prior to the event, so you can plan your purchases.

Joining us at the sale will be Wild Bloom Nursery, Xen Nursery, and the master gardeners, who will be on hand to answer all your gardening questions.

We will offer current OXA members a pre-sale on Friday (May 5) afternoon, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

It's an exciting weekend for gardeners as the Kelowna Garden Club plant sale is also May 6, at Guisachan Gardens in Kelowna, from 9 a.m. to noon and the volunteer friends of the Summerland Ornamental Gardens spring plant sale is May 6 and 7, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at that garden.

Follow us on social media for inspiration on the sustainable beauty that is xeriscape.

The Okanagan Xeriscape Association is extremely 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.

Sigrie Kendrick is a master gardener and executive-director of the non-profit Okanagan Xeriscape Association and can be reached at 778-363-8360 or by email at exec_dir@okanaganxeriscape.org.

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