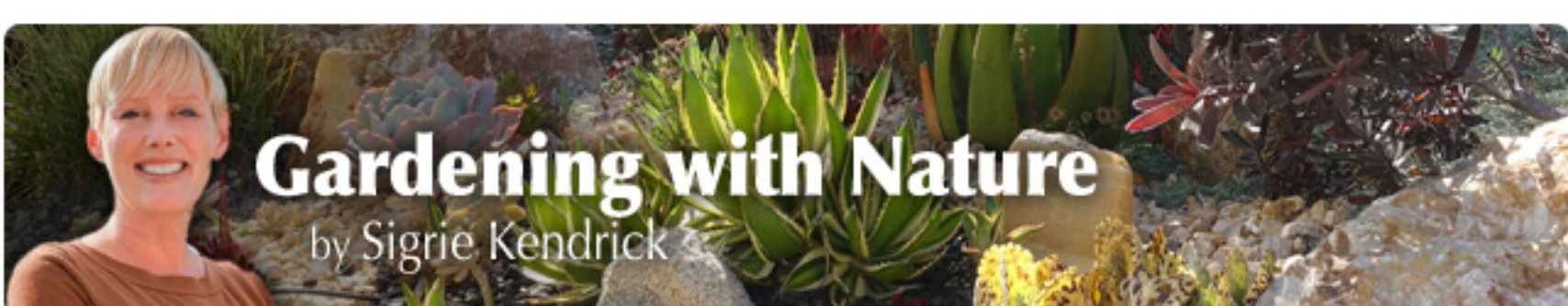




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Gardening with Nature

by Sigrie Kendrick

LANDSCAPE FABRIC NOT BEST

Why it's nuts to litter your landscape with fabric

Sigrie Kendrick - Aug 2, 2023 / 11:00 am



Photo: Judie Steeves

Feed your plants while you smother weeds by using an organic mulch as Sigrie Kendrick (right) and an OXA volunteer do here at the West Kelowna Xeriscape Spirit Square Garden. Landscape fabric just ends up topped with weeds or littering the landscape.

It's insanity.

Albert Einstein is generally believed to have been the one to state that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

This concept could certainly be applied to the continued use of geotextiles, also known as landscape fabric, by the landscape industry.

I was pondering this recently while working in the extreme heat in an area behind the Okanagan Xeriscape Association's demonstration garden that has landscape fabric covered with rocks, that is completely covered in weeds.

The sweat was running in my eyes so much that I couldn't see, and I was grumpy—a rarity for me at work in the garden. Why was I doing this? Well, the simple answer was if I didn't weed that area adjacent to the garden, all the weeds would migrate into the garden.

But it got me pondering the ridiculous notion that landscape fabric works in permanent landscapes, when our experience as an industry makes us well aware it does not.

Landscape fabric is useful in reducing weeds in seasonal vegetable gardens and other areas of production, but the crossover to permanent landscape areas has been an utter failure.

Landscape fabric deteriorates quickly if subjected to sunlight, and any organic matter on the fabric will soon be colonized by weeds growing through the fabric. Any attempt to eradicate these weeds leads to tearing of the fabric, which is then further compromises it as a barrier, leading to more weeds.

From an aesthetic standpoint the fabric is now at its worst, ripped and flapping in the breeze—not effective and definitely not attractive. So, stop using landscape fabric to control weeds. It doesn't work. The fabric quickly becomes a challenge to plant health, aesthetics, and weed control.

The reality is, weeding is an integral part of gardening that we should embrace, rather than complicate by installing landscape fabric.

An organic mulch is far more effective for both weed suppression and plant health. Such mulches can be reapplied throughout the life of your landscape, feeding the soil and plants and acting as a very efficient barrier against weeds.

Coming up

I know many of us are boating, camping etc. right now but save the day on your calendar for OXA's fall plant sale, to be held Sept. 23, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., in the OXA demonstration garden—the UnH2O Garden—in front of the H2O Aquatic Centre.

I will be featuring some of the plants that will be available for purchase in upcoming columns.

With our current drought situation, be sure to visit the www.makewaterwork.ca website and take the pledge to use water more efficiently on your landscape, thereby becoming eligible to win one of two \$500 gift certificates?

The UnH2O demonstration garden at 4075 Gordon Drive is looking spectacular right now, so stop in and see first-hand the beauty, resilience, and sustainability that is xeriscape.

The Okanagan Xeriscape Association is 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.

This article is written by or on behalf of an outsourced columnist and does not necessarily reflect the views of Castanet.