

Silver
Star

PASSES ON SALE NOW!

Gardening with Nature

by Sigrie Kendrick

WATER USE IN A DROUGHT

It's time to set water priorities in your garden

Sigrie Kendrick - Aug 30, 2023 / 11:00 am

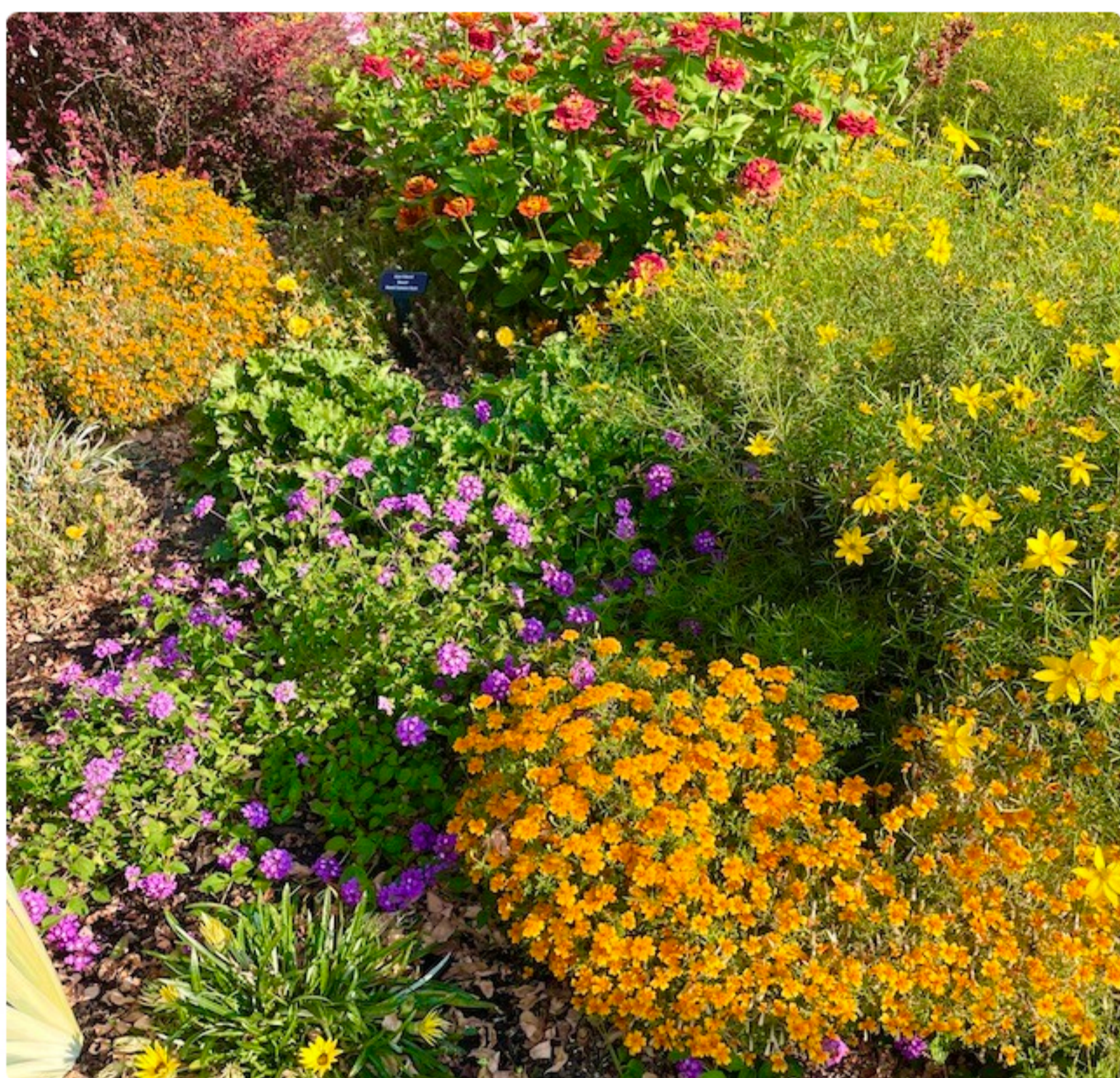


Photo: Judie Steeves

Despite the hot, dry summer, this vibrant and colourful collection of plants growing in the OXA xeriscape demonstration garden in Kelowna is still thriving on very little water, partly due to the generous application of a healthy mulch early in summer.

As we watch our favourite plants wilt and dry up under increasing water restrictions, record-setting drought conditions and extreme heat, decisions need to be made about where to draw the line.

In most water districts, hand-watering is still permitted, but that should be limited to the most efficacious instances, in order to conserve water for domestic consumption, firefighting and agriculture.

Most lawn grasses, without regular watering, will dry up and go brown. However, they will return to their usual lush green state once water is returned to the roots. So, they are not a priority for watering at this stage.

In fact, to have a green lawn today is considered by many to be a reason for shame, because it means you're not doing your part to conserve water in a serious drought.

Many perennials, including the Gloriosa Daisy, do not react well to severe water restrictions, but if you cut them back to the ground, they'll likely return to their normal beauty next year. There's another low priority for water and a reason to do some ground-level dead-heading.

In fact many plants that look dead above the soil line will regrow from their roots once they again receive water. One of the plants in our Okanagan Xeriscape Association demonstration garden that regularly does this is the *Monarda didyma*, known commonly as Beebalm.

One of the best practices to conserve water in your garden is by applying an organic mulch before your herbaceous perennials leaf out in the spring.

Both Glengrow and Nature's Gold are excellent choices and will limit water loss from the soil surface through evaporation, decrease the soil temperature during hot weather and limit weed growth so your plants are not competing for available water with weeds.

Such organic mulches also feed your plants, leading to healthier, more-resilient plant material.

The manner in which you water and the time you do so can be instrumental in conserving water. Obviously all types of sprinklers are extremely wasteful as they lose so much water to evaporation.

Drip irrigation is the very best choice and is the most-effective irrigation as it directs the water where it is needed at soil level and to the root zone.

The Regional District of Central Okanagan has determined you can decrease your water consumption 30% to 50% just by switching to drip irrigation.

Definitely do not water in the heat of the day as this leads to yet more water lost to evaporation. Instead set your irrigation to go on between dusk and dawn when the temperature is lower.

Consider the water needs of your plants and group them accordingly. I can't tell you how many times I have seen high-water-need plants, such as hydrangeas grouped with low-water-need plants such as ornamental grasses.

In this situation the lower-water-need plant will drown, often to the detriment of plant health.

Consult our plant database at www.okanaganxeriscape.org for information about the water requirements of hundreds of plants which we have broken down into three categories, indicated by either one, two, or three water drops. One-drop plants will require an average of 0 to three inches of supplemental irrigation, plants in the two-drop category will require four to seven inches of supplemental irrigation and thirsty three-drop plants require eight to 11 inches.

These calculations have been made based on mulched, average, well-drained soil with good organic content. If you have heavy, slow-draining clay soil, you may require less irrigation, while sandy, fast-draining soil requires more irrigation.

The bottom line is turf grass is definitely not where anyone should be using our precious water resource.

Visit the www.makewaterwork.ca website and take the pledge to use water more efficiently on your landscape and become eligible to win one of two \$500 gift certificates.

The OXA UNH2O xeriscape 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.

Don't forget to mark your calendar for OXA's second annual fall plant sale, Sept. 23 between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. in the demonstration garden.

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 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.