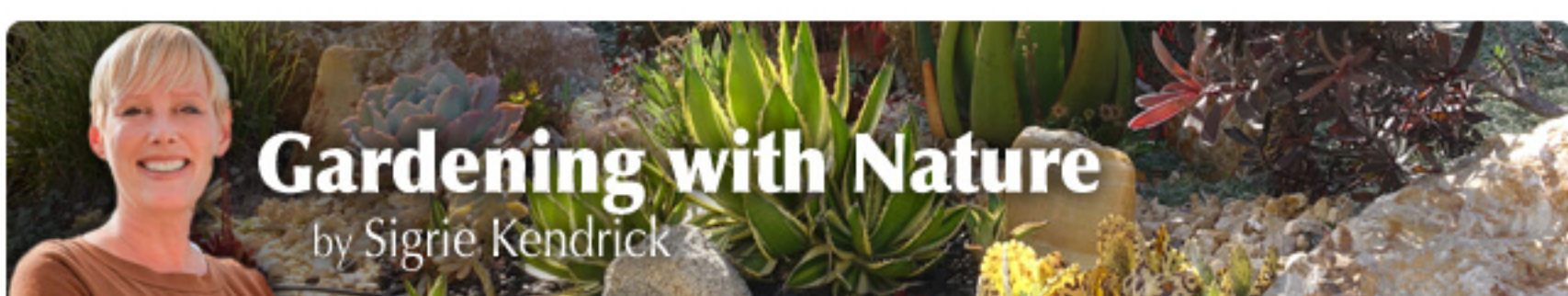




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Gardening with Nature

by Sigrie Kendrick

WATER USE DOWN

The water numbers don't lie, and the news is good

Sigrie Kendrick - Jan 31, 2024 / 11:00 am

Average Annual Water Demand Percentage by Use Type

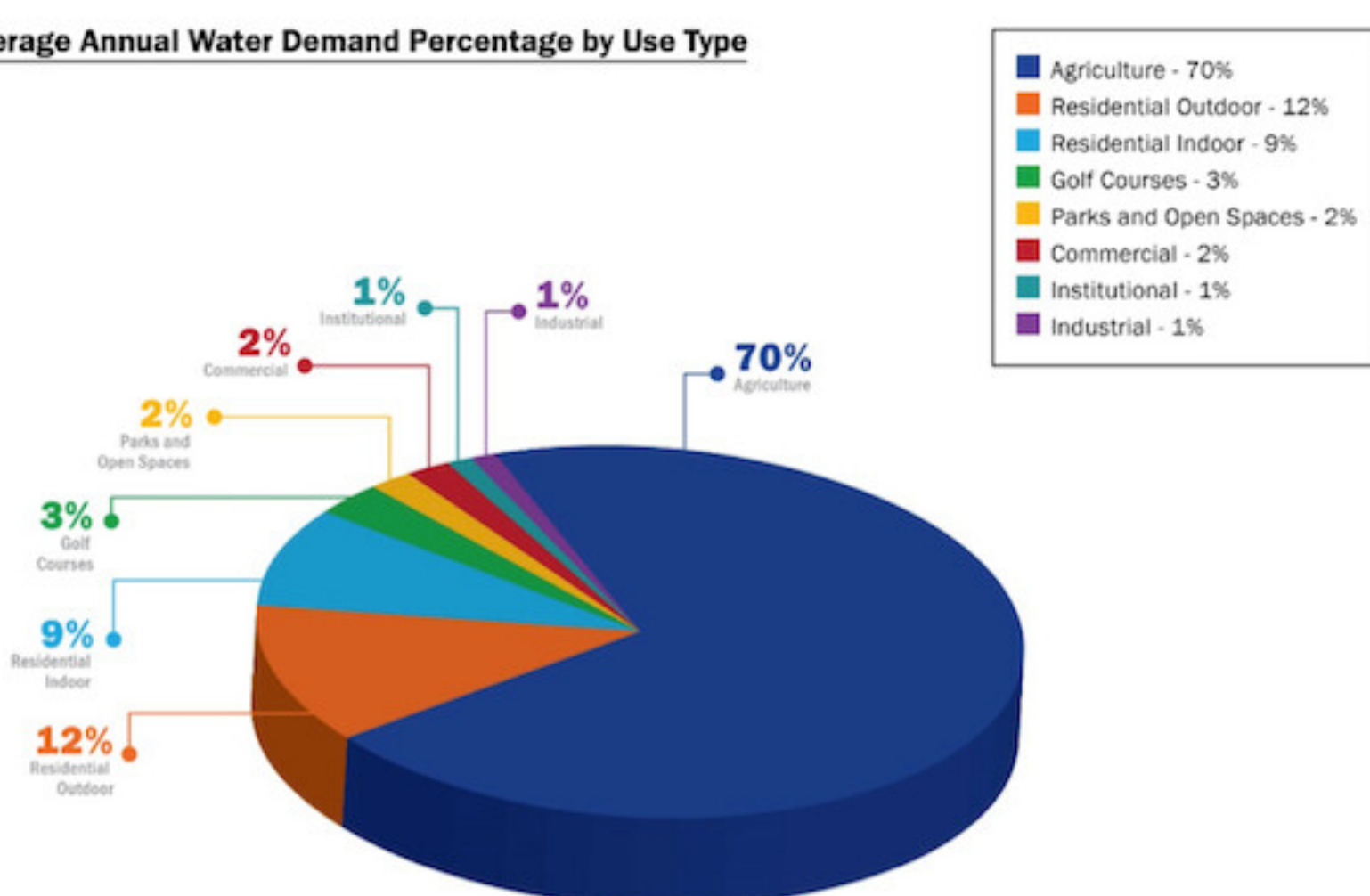


Photo: Contributed

Outdoor residential water use in the Okanagan has been slashed in half, as a percentage of total water use in the valley, according to statistics from the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board's pie chart illustrating water use in the valley was recently updated from an initial study done in 2006, and instead of 24% of total use, outdoor residential water use is now 12%. It's still second only to the use of water for agriculture.

You can find more details and the updated charts on average annual water demand by use type [here](#).

We have learned to make better choices about our outdoor water use, in part by learning about xeriscape through our Okanagan Xeriscape Association, and also due to the OBWB's outreach and educational initiatives through its [Make Water Work program](#). Information can also be found [here](#).

A majority of that 12% of outdoor water is wasted on maintaining turf grass and other water-hungry plantings such as cedar hedges. We can still make better conservation choices by choosing plants suitable for our semi-arid climate.

There is a myth of abundance about our available water because so many of us have lake views from our homes or places of work, but it is an indisputable fact that here in the Okanagan Valley, we have less water available per person than anywhere else in Canada.

Osoyoos, to the south of us, is the one true desert in Canada. Unfortunately, we also have one of the highest uses of water per person in the nation, with the average household in the Okanagan using 1,032 litres per day.

This use, coupled with an increase in demand as our population explodes, is a recipe for potential disaster.

When Gwen Steele founded the Okanagan Xeriscape Association in 2009, the concept of xeriscape was little known, but we've come a long way through education.

I am increasingly approached by local government, schools, stratas boards, clubs and private organizations, wanting to learn more about the principles of xeriscape.

If the idea of xeriscape is still foreign to you, head to our website at www.okanaganxeriscape.org for more information and lots of beautiful examples of sustainable water-wise gardens.

As you look forward to spring and may be considering changes to your garden, I encourage you to find inspiration for your own garden on our website.

Don't let the idea of a transition to xeriscape overwhelm you. Start small and learn as you go.

One of the easiest areas to xeriscape is that area I refer to as the "Hell strip"—that strip of property which exists between neighbouring driveways in most suburbs.

It's not a huge area, so it's not too daunting. The harsh conditions created by the reflected heat from the surrounding asphalt make it a perfect environment for many xeriscape plants.

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This year represents a momentous milestone for the Kelowna Garden Club as it celebrates its 100th anniversary.

To mark the occasion, the organization is hosting a day-long event Feb. 24 at Trinity Church in Kelowna, called Gardening into the Future.

There will be speakers, including myself, presenting on sustainable gardening, pest management, vegetable and container gardening, and there will be a trade show and demonstrations. Details can be found [here](#).

Another date to mark on your calendar is March 10 when the Kelowna Master Gardeners will host the always-popular Seedy Sunday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Parkinson Recreation Centre in Kelowna. Admission will be \$2 for adults, but children may attend free of charge.

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 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.