

## AREA APPROPRIATE PLANTS

## Top three questions about xeriscape

Sigrie Kendrick - Feb 28, 2024 / 11:00 am



Photo: Contributed

A Ligustrum vulgare (European Privet) hedge in the winter.

A great deal has changed in the gardening world in the last century in the Okanagan, so it's appropriate the Kelowna Garden Club celebrated its 100th birthday with a day-long event with the theme Gardening into the Future, reflecting some of those changes.

Last weekend's event was a day packed with valuable gardening information and tons of fun for gardeners.

There were five speakers and lots of vendors, all making the day feel like the kick-off for the upcoming gardening season.

My presentation was on the sustainable beauty that is xeriscape, after which I helped out people who visited the Okanagan Xeriscape Association's booth with questions about xeriscape.

The event was extremely well-attended and we had people lined up waiting with questions. The three topics top of mind for those I spoke with were:

1. How to lose the lawn
2. Alternatives for cedar hedges
3. Gardening with native plants

Overwhelmingly, individuals were interested in either eliminating their turf grass altogether or significantly reducing the area of turf planted—and with good reason. People are embracing the idea that thirsty turf grass is not where we should be using our precious water. Turf offers few benefits but exacts a huge price in terms of water use, fertilizer, time and maintenance.

Head over to our blog, *On the Dry Side*, at [www.okanaganxeriscape.org](http://www.okanaganxeriscape.org) to read about the many options for turf removal and the pros and cons of each. If total removal seems daunting, consider expanding perennial beds or choosing xeric ground cover alternatives.

As previously discussed in this column, cedar hedges are an extremely thirsty choice for use as a privacy screen and not well-suited to our semi-arid environment. When, not if, more-stringent water restrictions occur, these hedges will die and then present a significant fire hazard.

Visit our our xeriscape demonstration garden at 4075 Gordon Drive to see first-hand some of the alternatives planted there.

You'll see both evergreen and deciduous options such as *Pinus flexilis* (Limber Pine) and *Ligustrum vulgare* (European Privet), but there are any more hedging choices available on our plant database.

A few years ago, I planted the columnar *Hibiscus syriacus* (Rose of Sharon) for a client and after a few years for it to settle in, it has grown to form a stunning hedge.

Initially the client was reluctant to choose a deciduous option but after realizing they were snowbirds and away most of the winter, decided on the hibiscus. Now they are delighted by all of the pollinators visiting the pure white flowers well into the fall.

Today, there is a better appreciation of, and more interest in, gardening with plants native to the Okanagan.

An easy start to gardening with native plants is to plant them on the edges of your property and realize if you coddle them with water and fertilizer as you may do with your non-native plants, they will have a tendency to out-compete the non-native ones.

Though native plants will require supplementary irrigation to establish a strong root system, after that additional water may lead to root rot. They are happiest planted in lean soil with no amendments.

Native plants support native pollinators as they have evolved together over centuries, so consider finding space for them in your garden.

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One of the many benefits of a membership in Okanagan Xeriscape Association is the opportunity to purchase plants from XEN, the wholesale native nursery in West Kelowna.

Master Gardeners will host the always-popular Seedy Sunday on March 10 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Parkinson Recreation Centre. Admission to the event is \$2 for adults, and children attend free of charge.

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We've set May 11 as the date for our xeriscape spring plant sale, so stay tuned to our social media accounts for all the upcoming details.

*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](#).*

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