OKANAGAN XERISCAPE ASSOCIATION

March 2025
NEWSLETTER

Do your fingers itch to get into the soil?



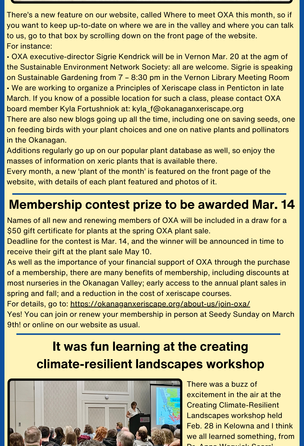
Often there's still snow on the ground when I begin to get itchy fingers; they're itching to get dirty and covered with soil, whether that's from planting seeds or plants—even weeding.
It may be too early to get out in the garden when the ground is still hard, but I can always get started with some seeds on the windowsill.
I'm lucky. When we renovated the kitchen, I insisted the big window be pushed out a few inches, so the windowsill would get brighter light—and it's south-facing, which also helps.
So, I had my handyman build a low wooden box to contain a heat cable, which I buried in sand, for a base to start seeds on. It works great with that bottom heat to get seeds sprouting in a hurry. The only thing is, it's screwed right into the windowsill, so there are always a couple of holes there the rest of the year... I'm sure there's a workaround.
I'm cheap, so I don't always buy peat pots or pellets, but will use emptied plastic clamshell salad boxes as tiny greenhouses, in which to get seeds started.
Cardboard egg cartons or recycled plastic plug pots also work well, but pots are fine too. Keeping the soil moist and warm is critical for most seeds.
Some seeds sprout within a few days, but others take as long as a couple of weeks to appear. Sweet peppers take far longer than lettuce and spinach to sprout.
I have tried to grow these plants on the windowsill, complete with a grow light, but I haven't had the greatest luck there. My daughter has a good setup for that though so it is possible.
Instead, I just get them started, then I have small seedlings ready to plant out as soon as the soil in the garden is workable.
I've started vegetables, but also perennials and annuals, ready to plant out when the soil is ready and temperatures are far along enough for each plant species. Timing is important.
Beware, the little plants can get leggy and vulnerable to pests and diseases if you start them too early and then make them wait in inadequate indoor light until it's time for them to go outside. Just a warning.
I confess I have, for years, started my own tomatoes on the windowsill, but you have to replant them every couple of weeks into deeper containers, each time removing the lower leaves and planting the bare stem into the soil, leaving just the top leaves above the soil. You end up with nice, sturdy plants with big, strong root systems, but it's a lot of work. Cardboard milk containers work well for this, as you can just peel them off when it's time to plant them out.
Keep an eye on the weather forecast so you are not trying to plant new seedlings out too early, subjecting them to frost or temperatures that are too cold. Also, always remember the importance of gradually getting indoor seedlings accustomed to being outdoors under much brighter light conditions, and be very wary of how much sun they get at first. The leaves will burn easily.
Starting seeds indoors is a great healer for itchy fingers and gives you a head start on gardening season.
- Judie Steeves, Newsletter Editor

Spring plant sale date set



This year's annual OXA Spring Plant Sale will be held Sat., May 10 at the greenhouses of Wild Bloom Nursery on Old Vernon Road in Kelowna from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., with a members-only pre-sale and meet and greet on-site from 5-7 p.m. the evening previous, with treats.
There will be a call for volunteers for the plant sale closer to the date. We will send out a request to those members who expressed an interest, in April.
Watch our social media posts for updates too.
Dig with Sig will start up again in mid-March, with up-to-date notification about dates, places and times on social media.
Coordinating volunteers will be OXA board member Jax Gullion, so contact her if you have questions or are interested in volunteering. Her email address is: jacqueline_g@okanaganxeriscape.org
Be sure to 'friend' OXA on Facebook or Instagram, so you receive our social media information, and check our website regularly for updates and new blogs.
Our volunteers have fun together with plants and enjoy our appreciation events, like pre-plant sale parties.

Check out our website



There's a new feature on our website, called Where to meet OXA this month, so if you want to keep up-to-date on where we are in the valley and where you can talk to us, go to that box by scrolling down on the front page of the website.
For instance:
• OXA executive-director Sigrie Kendrick will be in Vernon Mar. 20 at the agm of the Sustainable Environment Network Society: all are welcome. Sigrie is speaking on Sustainable Gardening from 7 – 8:30 pm in the Vernon Library Meeting Room
• We are working to organize a Principles of Xeriscape class in Penticton in late March. If you know of a possible location for such a class, please contact OXA board member Kyla Fortushniak at: kyla_f@okanaganxeriscape.org
There are also new blogs going up all the time, including one on saving seeds, one on feeding birds with your plant choices and one on native plants and pollinators in the Okanagan.
Additions regularly go up on our popular plant database as well, so enjoy the masses of information on xeric plants that is available there.
Every month, a new 'plant of the month' is featured on the front page of the website, with details of each plant featured and photos of it.

Membership contest prize to be awarded Mar. 14

Names of all new and renewing members of OXA will be included in a draw for a $50 gift certificate for plants at the spring OXA plant sale.
Deadline for the contest is Mar. 14, and the winner will be announced in time to receive their gift at the plant sale May 10.
As well as the importance of your financial support of OXA through the purchase of a membership, there are many benefits of membership, including discounts at most nurseries in the Okanagan Valley; early access to the annual plant sales in spring and fall; and a reduction in the cost of xeriscape courses.
For details, go to: https://okanaganxeriscape.org/about-us/join-oxa/
Yes! You can join or renew your membership in person at Seedy Sunday on March 9th! or online on our website as usual.

It was fun learning at the creating climate-resilient landscapes workshop



There was a buzz of excitement in the air at the Creating Climate-Resilient Landscapes workshop held Feb. 28 in Kelowna and I think we all learned something, from Dr. Anna Warwick Sears' keynote address showing the latest scientific data behind why we should xeriscape, to Ashlee Hignell's talk on the new varietals of xeric plants now available. Mario Lanthier's informative session on analyzing tree root defects had everyone working together in their groups, passing large tree roots from table to table, and Kelowna assistant fire chief Dennis Craig made a powerful presentation about about using FireSmart principles in landscaping.
It was a sold-out event, with nearly 200 in attendance from all corners of the horticultural industry, to avid gardeners.
Thanks so much to all the volunteers who put in so many hours of effort pulling it all together, and to our financial partners and all the experts who enthusiastically shared their specific areas of knowledge about plants and xeriscaping.

Xeriscape Comments or Questions?

If you have experienced a great success or a bit of a failure in your xeriscape efforts, feel free to help fellow xeriscape enthusiasts by sharing your experience.
Please go to the member section of the OXA website. There you can fill in a request form to comment or ask questions about xeriscape issues you've come across. You will notice the other exclusive member opportunity in this section - you can request a visit to your home using our Garden Mentor program. https://okanaganxeriscape.org/about-us/member-area/
All of us can learn so much from each other, so sharing our successes and disappointments helps everyone.
Join us on social media on Facebook and Instagram for regular updates about all things of interest to gardeners interested in xeriscape.
The blog on our website is also regularly updated and includes a wide variety of information about gardening.
There are lots of perks to membership in OXA. Read about them by going to our website: www.okanaganxeriscape.org.

Visit our Website | **OXA Membership**

Feel free to share this OXA newsletter with friends and family, co-workers and neighbours and encourage everyone you know to support OXA by becoming a member. Everything we do depends on your support. Contact the editor at: judiesteeves49@gmail.com if you have questions.

The Okanagan Xeriscape Association is a not-for-profit organization formed in 2009 to provide information on gardening with nature, or xeriscape, for those living in the Okanagan.

In collaboration with the Okanagan Basin Water Board
Make Water Work Program

Okanagan Basin WATER BOARD

OKANAGAN waterwise One valley. One water.

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