



WATER-WISE TIPS FOR FOOD GARDENS

- Most food crops require adequate water to produce a good yield.
- By following the Seven Principles of Xeriscape, water use will be more efficient.
- Additional benefits may include:
 - improved soil, less pest problems, higher yields, and reduced maintenance tasks.

TIPS FOR APPLYING THE XERISCAPE METHOD TO FOOD GARDENS:

PLANNING AND DESIGN:

- Locate the garden in full sun. Most vegetables perform best with maximum sunlight.
- Stay away from trees. Most have wide reaching root systems that make a bee-line for good soil and extra moisture.
- Design to minimize labour tasks.
- Lay out beds to maximize planting space while eliminating the need to walk on cultivated soil. Width should allow for easy reach - generally two to four feet wide.

SOIL PREPARATION:

- Eliminate weeds – especially field bind weed and quack grass which have extensive root systems.
- Loose, rich soil, high in organic matter, will retain moisture while allowing adequate drainage and good root growth.
- Well-rotted manure and compost are good soil builders.
- New garden beds can be made directly on top of lawn by using the lasagne method as described by Patricia Lanza in her many Lasagne Gardening books.

PRACTICAL TURF AREAS:

- Eliminate turf from a vegetable garden area to avoid the need for weekly mowing and edge trimming and annual edging (to prevent turf invading the garden).
- A labour-saving, weed-resistant path can be made by laying down an overlapping layer of cardboard topped with a thick layer of wood shavings. After a few years this will be rotted down. Add it to your compost pile and lay down fresh materials.
- If not in a forest interface area, a thick layer of pine needles could be used. They will break down far more slowly than shavings.

EFFICIENT IRRIGATION:

- Design the beds so they can be watered by drip irrigation. It's the most efficient, watering only the vegetables not the surrounding soil.
- Covering the lines with mulch prevents loss from evaporation.
- 'Jeff Balls 60 Minute Garden' is a good book for irrigation tips and many more ideas to maximize results and minimize labour.

- Where possible, group plants with similar water needs together.

APPROPRIATE PLANT SELECTION:

- We are fortunate as we can grow an abundant variety of crops. Choose varieties that grow well here and time plantings by seasonal temperatures.
- Cool season crops such as spinach and salad greens do best in spring and fall.
- Summer heat produces excellent tomatoes, peppers, corn and much more.

MULCHING:

- Mulch is any organic material (e.g. such as compost, rotted leaves, straw) that lies on top of the soil.
- It prevents evaporation (reducing the need to irrigate), drastically reduces weed growth and keeps the soil surface soft for easy harvesting and weed pulling.
- Mulch gradually breaks down feeding soil micro-organisms which release nutrients to feed the plants.

MAINTENANCE:

- If you have followed these principles, maintenance tasks will be much less than a conventional garden.
- Pull weeds before they go to seed. Put weeds with seeds or invasive roots (i.e. quack grass) into your green bin – NOT the compost.
- Practice the no dig method. Add mulch and compost on top of the soil so the soil food web is not disturbed and will break these materials down to feed plants.
- Fertilize with natural materials such as rich compost/manures.
- Plant pollinator plants to invite pollinators and beneficial insects to the garden, eliminating pest problems.
- Avoid growing plants that are pest or disease magnets.

Adapted from October 28, 2016 article by Gwen Steele in Kelowna Capital News.

Drought tolerant herbs:

Chives	Lovage	Sorrel
Garlic chives	Marjoram	Tarragon
Fennel	Mint	Thyme
Lavender	Oregano	Rosemary (not hardy)
Lemon Balm	Sage	Bay (not hardy)

Some other crops that are drought tolerant once established:

Currants	Gooseberry
Asparagus	Rhubarb
Apricot	Italian plum
Grapes	Horseradish

For more edible, low water plants and plants to attract pollinators go to:

www.okanaganxeriscape.org

The Okanagan Xeriscape Association wishes to thank the Okanagan Basin Water Board for funding. Find water saving tips at: www.okwaterwise.ca