

It is well known that an attractive, well-maintained landscape adds value to your property – as much as 15% according to a leading Canadian real estate company.

Trees provide substance and a feeling of stability to your landscape, while flowering perennials and shrubs contribute colour. Bark mulch creates a finished look as it keeps dust and weeds in check.

A neat, tidy and welcoming outdoor landscape makes a great first impression and welcomes potential buyers to explore the interior of the house. And a low maintenance landscape is an important consideration in our time-crunched lives.

A homeowner can successfully address both challenges – a presentable approach to the house and a low maintenance garden – by choosing from a great selection of plant material suitable for the Okanagan.

Trees offer a number of benefits. They provide shade and habitat, reduce energy costs (by their shading in the summer and sheltering in the winter), clean the air, are relatively low-maintenance (many species), and are lovely to look at.

Why not go one step further? For example, instead of an ‘ornamental’ tree, why not choose a tree that produces nuts or fruit? Fruit trees flower in the spring – their attractive blossoms are one of the early signs of the annual reawakening.

Many fruit tree varieties grow well in the Okanagan with our warm summers and frosty winters. If you don’t have room for a large tree, simply choose one that is a dwarf variety. (Be sure to select a self-pollinating tree if you have a single tree that is not in the vicinity of others.) There’s always the option of a ‘fruit salad’ tree: one tree that produces three or four different fruits.

The sharing of harvest is a terrific way to come together as a neighbourhood community as well. It only takes a few minutes of ‘over-the-fence’ planning to grow a variety of different fruits on your block.

Please note I am in no way suggesting you sacrifice a healthy, mature tree to replace it with a fruiting species.

A hedge is another very common feature in our landscapes. Many hedges consist of a row of hedging cedars, often ‘shaped’ by deer or stressed by our dry climate. Cedars are a coastal plant and do best in wetter, more humid climates. There are several alternate hedging plants that are a better ‘fit’ in the Okanagan.

Why not go one step further? A hedge of raspberries, planted along a berm if the extra height is required, makes a good barrier. It is prickly, and in just a couple of seasons the canes have adequately propagated to form strong, upright canes.

A raspberry hedge planted along a property line provides another opportunity to create community. Try offering the delicious berries ripening on 'their' side of the hedge to your neighbours.

Everyone likes to have flowering shrubs in their yard, particularly ones with a heavenly scent or that have a year-round presence. For example, rhododendron and azaleas will grow in the Okanagan, but prefer a more temperate climate with acidic soil and struggle to *survive* here, let alone *thrive*.

Why not go one step further? Have you thought about the multiple uses of lavender, rosemary, oregano or other herbal species? Lavender and rosemary are semi-evergreen, their leaves are scented, they are deer-resistant, have low maintenance requirements, and have culinary and/or herbal value. All three of these herbs are perennials so they will continue to make a fragrant and useful presence in your garden year after year.

Do you have an arbor or pergola with climbing roses or clematis on it? Maybe try grapes instead. Love the look of ferns? Maybe asparagus would be a nice addition. Looking for a large-leaved, colourful plant? Try rhubarb or a Swiss chard with a brightly coloured rib.

Berries and other edibles need irrigation but a drip system – which is highly adaptable -- is all you need to be on your way to a harvestable yard.

Be creative and have some fun with your yard as you enjoy the multiple benefits of edible plants.

"A man who wants to lead the orchestra must turn his back on the crowd."

Max Lacado

Thanks to those who spent their coveted Saturday morning at the College last weekend learning about Square Foot Gardening. It was a great mix of novice and seasoned gardeners. I'd love to hear how your "gardens grow" using this intensive method.

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