

Happy (almost) Spring readers!

I debated for some time about whether or not to open my first Water Wisdom column of 2011 on a 'down' note, but I decided this is as good a time as ever to be a realist. Be assured, however, I touch on some solutions today and will provide your details in the weeks ahead.

Whether it is a result of climate change or merely a natural cycle, our planet is increasingly exhibiting some violent behaviour. Witness the upheaval in Japan – several major earthquakes, a tsunami and a volcanic eruption. These events in occurred within less than a week's time of each other and are likely related.

Even though we are immersed with video and news reporting, it is difficult to comprehend what Japanese communities are experiencing as they face the devastating impact on their families and livelihoods.

One thing is certain though. The things we humans need to survive are scarce and/or in jeopardy in the areas hardest hit by the recent events: Water, Food, and Shelter.

If we can learn something from the trials currently being faced by the Japanese and other communities globally, it should be this: it can happen here and we should be prepared.

It is time (actually, it's long overdue) to start conserving our resources through applied management. We are the best stewards for the natural resources we need to survive, specifically Water and Soil/Dirt (from which our food is harvested).

There are many ways to go about this, and it is most definitely a process, but here's something to mull over. We've seen time and again, how small steps taken by single individuals gain momentum and, once the word spreads and the number of participants reaches a tipping point, there is no limit to the effect it might have. The near-immediate transfer of information catalyzes this phenomenon.

The concept of creating a symbiotic relationship with the earth, one in which both partners are enriched and increasingly healthy and productive, can be called many things: sustainable gardening, ecological gardening, edible gardening, organic gardening, permaculture, GYO (Grow Your Own) gardening, high-intensity gardening, to list a few.

Whether you own a home or rent, have a large yard or only a balcony, everyone can participate. It is often said that landscaping your yards adds property value. Why not get more value – and contribute more value – by including plants that have edible parts: vegetables, herbs, fruit or berries, and nuts?

There are many other reasons to plant edible plant material as well that I won't go into in detail but include environmental, health, economic and social concerns.

Follow proven ecologically sound best practices for the greatest reward. A few examples include reducing or eliminating supplemental irrigation by harvesting rainwater; using compost and

'natural' products to enrich your soil; using organic mulch to maintain soil temperatures, moisture and add nutrients; patterning your plant groupings after natural plant communities; and reducing the use of fossil fuels.

I will continue to write about sustainable gardening in the weeks ahead. In the meantime, I welcome your thoughts and comments at grasslands-nursery.blogspot.com.

Grasslands Nursery was recognized by the Okanagan Life Reader's Choice Awards as being in the top three Garden Centers in the South Okanagan again in 2010; we also placed in the Landscape Design category. Thank you so much your support; we promise to continue providing you with exceptional products and services.

Toni Boot is the founder and owner of Grasslands Nursery in Summerland, a nursery specializing in sustainable gardening. Comments and suggestions may be directed to her at grassnursery@telus.net or through www.grasslandsnursery.ca