A certified Heritage Garden saves an average of 20 gallons per square foot of water per year, which is comparable to the water it takes to grow lawn grass.
ANN AUTREY PHOTO

Covid-19 Made Gardening History, too

Forced to stay home, many homeowners chose to put their efforts into plants.

by Carol Barany for Yakima Valley Master Gardeners

Remarkable in so ways, the year 2020 also managed to make gardening history. Faced with the Covid-19 pandemic, Americans turned to gardening in record numbers. Half did so "as a way to get out of the house, relieve stress, provide security, and for something to do while sticking close to home."

Over and over, Americans said they gardened to add beauty to their outdoor surroundings, and almost half planned to increase the size of their garden in 2021.

As one season follows another, we gardeners like to think we're growing a little wiser.

As clean water becomes a more precious commodity, conservation should be everyone's concern.

These days, it's impossible to ignore a gardening style that's more sustainable. Xeric gardens (*xeros* is the Greek word for dry) are popping up everywhere. The term used to scare me. I thought xeric gardens consisted of a few prickly plants, no flowers, lots of rocks, and the requisite bleached cow skull to reinforce the impression that conditions in this garden were really tough.

I couldn't have been more wrong. Lush, colorful native plants, along with hundreds of newly introduced perennials from all over the world, thrive in arid eastern Washington. They grow with fewer resources, less

For information on the Yakima County Master Gardeners Program:

https://extension.wsu.edu/yakima/home-garden/master-gardeners/

A certified Heritage Garden isn't just shriveled scrub brush, but can provide wonderful colors to enhance any garden.
ANN AUTREY PHOTO

effort, and without sacrificing a garden's beauty. I just needed some help in learning how to build a garden around them.

Heritage Garden Program

The Heritage Garden Program serves Yakima County and provides free on-site visitation to homeowners and businesses, helping them create a low-water-use garden using native plants. Assistance with weed control, drip irrigation, selection of appropriate plants and a planting plan is also included at no cost. The program is sponsored by the North and South Yakima Conservation Districts, Washington State Department of Ecology, and Yakima Basin Integrated Plan.

It all started with a fairly simple idea. In December of 2010, a member of the Columbia Basin Chapter of the Washington Native Plant Society (CBNPS) approached

This delicate blue flax, *Linum perenne,* proves you needn't sacrifice beauty to grow native plants.
ANN AUTREY PHOTO

the Benton Conservation District (BCD) about developing a program to promote low water-use landscaping using native plants. The timing was perfect, because the BCD was having difficulty changing the public's perception that low water-use landscaping was barren and uninteresting. Together, the BCD and the CBNPS spent the next 18 months refining the Heritage Garden concept, which includes these elements:

FLORA: Five different species of plants, sited in locations that match their requirements for water, light, and soil conditions, must be used. Washington State native plants should make up 75% of the flora, and 30% of them must require less than 10" of water annually. Additionally, no more than 10% must need more than 30" of water annually.

FAUNA: At least one water source is available for wildlife.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE: At least one plant species of cultural significance is included. Examples are plants that indigenous people used for food, shelter, or medicine; or species noted on the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

GEOLOGICAL FEATURES: Basalt flows and Ice-Age floods shaped the predominating geologic features of our valley. Include at least one of these features, such as basalt columns, large basalt for mulch, small crushed basalt for mulch and foot paths, river rock, basalt used as a bench, or flood tumbled boulders.

IRRIGATION SYSTEM: The system is designed to apply appropriate amounts of water to each planting zone. Usually a drip system will provide water to plants that, once established, will require less than 10" of water annually.

WEED CONTROL: All plants on the Washington State Noxious Weed List are excluded. The simple fact is that

This homeowner's Heritage Garden provides a nearly carefree space.
ANN AUTREY PHOTO

if you don't control weeds before you plant, they will control you.

If the above requirements are met, and the garden complies with all county and city codes, laws, ordinances, and HOA rules, the garden will receive a yard sign stating that it is a certified Heritage Garden.

Implementation of these elements provides an average water savings of 20 gallons per square foot each year, compared to growing a lawn.

Scheduling an appointment doesn't mean that you're ready to rip out your entire landscape and start all over again. Perhaps there is a narrow strip of lawn along your driveway that's impossible to keep green, or you have a weed patch that you just know is destined for greater things.

Maybe a list of native plants that thrive in Yakima could be a catalyst to get started, or perhaps you need help making your irrigation system more efficient. While six criteria must be met for your garden to be certified, you can choose just one or two to get started.

Take a virtual tour of some local Heritage Gardens at www.hgcd.info. For more information or to schedule an appointment, contact ann-autrey@conservewa.net.

For more information, links, and photographs, visit the Yakima Master Gardener Column Website: https://tinyurl.com/mg-columns