



Partnering For Our Future!

Oldman River Basin
Water Quality Initiative

Summer 2003

Newsletter

Xeriscaping - the New Craze

One of the biggest trends in gardening in the past decade is Xeriscaping. The term xeriscape is derived from the Greek word xeros, meaning dry, and the Anglo-Saxon word scape, meaning view. It doesn't matter if you live in a condo, an urban home, on a farm or acreage. There are many approaches you can take in xeriscaping such as using all native plants or using a combination of native and non-native species.

There are many environmental reasons to Xeriscape your yard but you will also notice a considerable difference in the amount of labour required to keep your yard looking great. With xeriscaping there is less watering, weeding, fertilizing, pruning, mowing and pesticides. You will spend a lot less time working in your garden and a lot more time enjoying it.

Dandelion Blossom Jelly

4 cups dandelion blossoms without stems
4 cups water
1 tsp lemon or orange extract
1 pkg Certo
4½ cups sugar

Boil the flowers in the water for 3 minutes. Drain off 3 cups of liquid. Add remaining ingredients and proceed as you would for normal jam or jelly making.

Visit the Alberta Native Plant Council web page at www.anpc.ab.ca for more information on xeriscaping, native plant seed sources and more fun dandelion recipes!

Six things you need to consider when xeriscaping:

1. **Design for Water Conservation:** Xeriscaped yards can be beautiful and colourful yet still conserve water. If you use plants that are native to the area they will not need any extra water because they are adapted to live in this environment.
2. **Improve Soil:** It is important to improve the ability of your soil to hold water and nutrients before planting.
3. **Reduce Lawn Areas:** This doesn't mean get rid of your lawn altogether. To keep lawns green you need to use a lot of water; so to save water, you can use more drought tolerant grasses or just have a smaller lawn.
4. **Efficient Irrigation:** It is important to understand how and when plants need water so that water is not wasted. Efficient irrigation can reduce water use by a *minimum* of 20%.
5. **Mulching:** Organic mulch such as wood chips or lawn clippings, placed on the soil surface will conserve water, reduce weeding and improve the soil
6. **Appropriate Plant Selection:** In most of the Oldman River Basin, the annual rainfall is less than 30 cm, yet the average yard needs around 54 cm. By choosing drought tolerant plants we can minimize this discrepancy.



Information in this article was adapted from "Creating the Prairie Xeriscape - Low-maintenance, water-efficient gardening" by Sara Williams

ORBWQI Partners

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (Research Branch and Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration)

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Pincher Creek Municipal District of Taber • Municipal District of Ranchland • Oldman River Intermunicipal Service Agency • Southern
Alberta Environmental Group Town of Claresholm • Town of Coaldale • Town of Coalhurst • Town of Fort Macleod • Town of Nanton •
Town of Picture Butte • University of Lethbridge • Village of Barnwell • Village of Barons

Water Programs a Big Hit!

Sandi Riemersma is full of great ideas. On behalf of the Lower Little Bow Watershed Group, she approached Wendy Devent and Cheryl Dash of the Project Team with the idea to have a poster and colouring contest at some of the rural schools in the Lower Little Bow River watershed. That idea blossomed into a pilot project, funded by the Mountain Equipment Co-op Environment Fund, involving six different water-themed programs for grades 1 to 6 in addition to the contest. In May, Sandi and Wendy went out to 3 schools (Dorothy Dagliesh, Huntsville Elementary and Gold Springs School) with their supplies and enthusiasm ready. What they weren't prepared for was the excitement, energy and knowledge that the students possessed. All of the interactive school programs revolved around the school curriculum. The intent was to get the students involved in the programs so that they would do more than learn – they would have fun too!

Grade 1: The Wheat Meet

In Grade 1 This program involved a competition between the "Mighty Wheat Plant" and a very determined class of grade one students. The events tested speed, endurance and strength. The winner? The undefeated champion was the Mighty Wheat Plant. The students were stiff competition for the Mighty Wheat but I have to admit the competition was fixed so the wheat plant would have an advantage in most of the events.

Grade 2: Hitchhikers

The students got to take a trip down a river in this 30-minute program. I don't know how many of them would have volunteered for the voyage if they had known about all the pollution they were going to pick up along the way. Thankfully, there was a wastewater treatment plant and a wetland to clean them off and get rid of all those nasty hitchhikers.



Grade 3: Web of Life

What good is an ecosystem with no water? That is what Sandi and Wendy proved in this program. A typical prairie ecosystem was created involving trees, beavers, snakes, farm animals, birds and even the occasional bear and caribou – okay, maybe not so typical. It didn't matter what we put in the ecosystem the results were always the same. When we took the water out of the system, all we were left with was a few holes in the ground. Everyone agreed no one would want to live in an ecosystem without water, even if they could.



Grade 4: Waste in our World

Do you think of water as garbage? None of the grade four students did. But why not? We throw it out everyday. We may not throw it in a garbage can or recycling bin but we throw it down the sink, tub, toilet and on the ground everyday. The students came up with solutions for water conservation and how to keep pollutants from being mixed with the clean water from the ground.

Grade 5: Wetlands

This is Sandi's favourite topic and maybe a few of the students' now as well. This program was similar to the grade 2 program with a lot more focus on what wetlands did, what pollutants they could clean-up and which ones they couldn't. Everyone decided it was easier to keep the water clean than to clean it up afterwards.

Grade 6: Town Meeting

In this really fun program the students became citizens, animals and plants from a town with a very important decision to make – what should the financially strapped town do with a piece of property in town with a river, beautiful old cottonwood forest and many different stakeholders involved. The consensus – You can't please all of the people (or in this case people, plants and animals) all of the time. But we already knew that, didn't we?

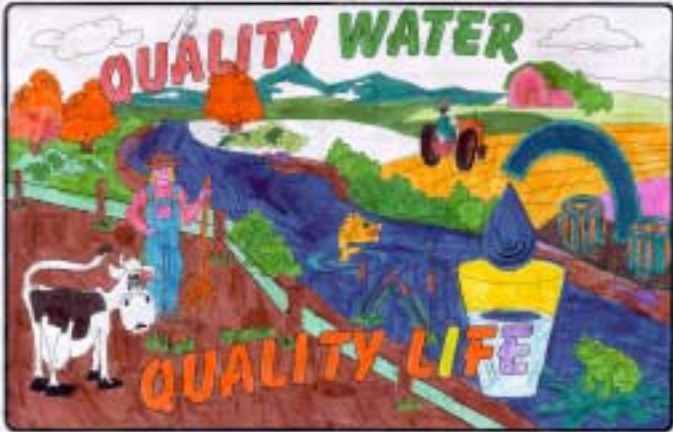
Thank you to the Lower Little Bow Watershed Group who had the task of judging the posters and colouring forms. There were many incredible entries and it was difficult to pick the final winners. We would also like to say a special thank you to Dave Boris for going to the schools to award the prizes and for sharing his experiences with water quality on his farm.

"When wells run dry, we know the worth of water" - Ben Franklin

"Throughout the history of literature, the guy who poisons the well has been the worst of all villains..." - Author unknown

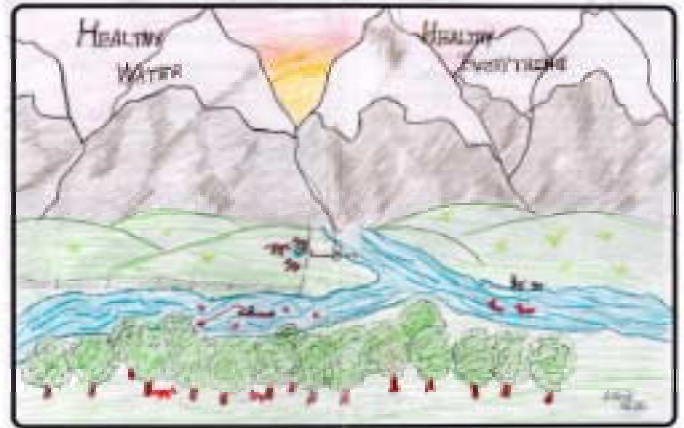
And the Winners Are...

Winner of Colouring Contest



Marisa Lelekach – Grade 2. Huntsville School

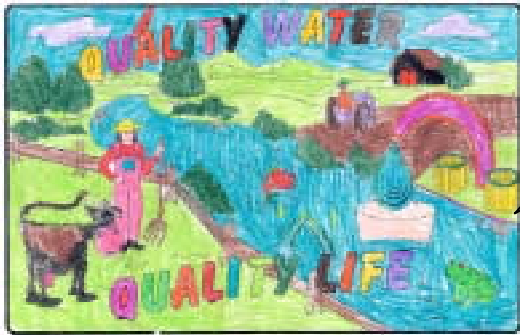
Winner of Poster Contest



Anthony Walter – Grade 6, Gold Ridge School

Top in Each Grade

The top Colouring sheet and Poster in each grade were also awarded prizes that were generously donated by Alberta Environment, Alpenland, Home Hardware, Safeway Foods, and Sport Mart.



Grade 1
Katarina Bantz
Dorothy Dagliesh

Grade 4
Melissa Walter
Gold Ridge School



Grade 2
Megan
Gold Ridge School

Grade 6
Ashley Sparks
Dorothy Dagliesh



Grade 3
Tina Unger
Hunsville School

Grade 7-9
Margaret Waldner
Gold Ridge School



Rural BMP Update

The Rural Team has been working with the Lower Little Bow River Watershed Group to divert clean water run-off around a wintering site. The designs have been completed and construction is expected to start on the ditch and berm in early July.

The Beaver Creek Watershed Group has established a water quality monitoring network from the headwaters of Beaver Creek to the long-term monitoring site established by the Water Survey of Canada. Group members are sampling and assisting with flow monitoring.

www.oldmanbasin.org

Make sure you take the time to visit our updated web page. You'll notice lots of changes and improvements.

DC&I Update

The DC&I Team will be staying busy this summer helping the rural and urban teams on their projects, as well as starting a new project of their own.

With the support of Alberta Environment, the DC&I team is going to start monitoring urban impacts of the towns of Pincher Creek and Cardston. Monitoring will be conducted upstream and downstream of these towns on Pincher and Lee creeks respectively.

Water Quality samples will be taken 3 times during summer precipitation events and 3 times during baseflow periods. Team members will be looking at nutrients, bacteria, pesticides and basic water chemistry similar parameters to those studied elsewhere along the Oldman River.

Urban BMP Update

In order to tackle the amount of work involved in the Residential BMP Pilot Project, the Urban Team has created two working groups – a Technical subgroup and an Education and Communications subgroup.

The Education and Communications subgroup has met several times to discuss surveys, educational materials and funding opportunities. The survey will be used to determine behaviours and attitudes toward outdoor water conservation, as well as the public's understanding of the storm sewer system.

The Urban Technical Team has been working with the DC&I Team to determine what water quality variables will be measured and the sampling protocol required. There will be a few months of baseline data collection before any changes occur in the test community.

Project Team Update

The Project Team (previously known as the Communications Team) is hoping to bring a Water Conservation message to a school near you. The team is arranging to work with a local middle school to establish a xeriscaped garden. The garden will be created by the students with the guidance of the Project Team and at the end of the project a booklet will be developed to help other schools with similar projects.

The team is also working with Alberta Environment to host some "Water Sessions". Each two hour session will be held the third Wednesday of the month from September to December. More information on these sessions will be forwarded when it is available.

Get your copy now!



Call (403) 382-4239 or e-mail us at orbwqi@gov.ab.ca

The price is \$20.00 (we pay the GST). Sorry credit cards are not currently accepted.

If paying by cheque, please make it payable to the Chinook Health Region but send your order to the Initiative

Financial Update

The Initiative has been working hard to secure operating and specific project funds. For the 2003-2004 year, the Initiative has raised over \$110,000 in grants from Alberta Health and Wellness, Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and Mountain Equipment Co-op.

Local municipalities have also been very supportive and between the City of Lethbridge, County of Lethbridge, the MDs of Pincher Creek, Ranchland, and Taber, the Towns of Claresholm, Coaldale, Coalhurst, Fort Macleod, Granum, Nanton, Picture Butte and Taber and the Villages of Barnwell and Barons over \$37,000 has been contributed.

We are well on our way to reaching our financial goals – thank you to all our supporters.



**Oldman River Basin
Water Quality Initiative**

Mark your Calendars!

The next Annual Workshop is on March 2, 2004 at the Lethbridge Lodge. Next year's workshop will focus on Creative Community Solutions and will have sessions on Urban and Rural BMP Solutions as well as different approaches to Education and Public Awareness.