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Weeds a growing concern for city

Local News

By HEATHER IBBOTSON

Updated 3 months ago

Creeping infestations of weeds into sports fields, parks and traffic islands, along with the loss of 75% of the city's decades-old Lorne Park rose garden, are some of the local consequences of a provincewide herbicide and pesticide ban initiated in the spring of 2009.

Two summers after the ban, the effects are beginning to show.



James Dignard of the Brantford parks and recreation's turf maintenance department trims weeds along Ballantyne Drive on Wednesday. The work used to require a total of a six hours a year before the pesticide ban when a herbicide was used but it now takes as much as 90 man hours to maintain the roadside - CHRISTOPHER SMITH, The Expositor

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"We are starting to see more weed infestations," said Dennis Wale, foreman of horticulture and turf maintenance with the city's parks and recreation department.

Pricey eco-friendly weed control alternatives are more than 10 times the cost of traditionally used products and must be applied three or four times more often, thereby increasing labour costs, too, Wale said.

"It's not practical to spend that kind of money," he said.

Before the ban was enacted, Wale had predicted that the Lorne Park rose garden might be threatened. Roses are fussy and vulnerable plants that need a lot of attention and are prone to pest infestations, he said.

Without certain pesticides, the plants began to fare poorly and a decision had to be made.

Three-quarters of the rose garden was removed in the spring, leaving only about 30 plants in the memorial garden originally planted in recognition of the Victorian Order of Nurses.

The extensive rose garden had been a fixture of Lorne Park for at least 35 years, Wale said.

"It was a tough decision to make but that's what we're up against. It's unfortunate," he said.

Annuals were planted in the former rose garden this summer and perennials may be planted there in 2011, Wale said.

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Turf areas throughout the city are also being affected by the ban's limitations, Wale said.

"Our current turf program will only work for the short term," he said.

The parks department's current remedies of seeding and watering will maintain turf areas for the next three to five years, depending on the growing seasons.

Overall, turf areas have survived fairly well this summer due to timely rains that have prevented grass from becoming stressed, he said.

However, the current remedies will keep the weeds at bay for only so long. Three to five years from now "is when the weeds will start to dominate the turf areas. That's when we start to get into trouble," Wale said.

The expensive ban-exempt products now allowed for weed control are not as effective as those used previously, he said.

The environmentally acceptable alternative only burns off weed foliage and does not eliminate the plant, compared to Roundup which would entirely kill the weed.

As a result, weeds can start to green up again within two to three weeks, making it more difficult to establish new lawn area because of constant competition with weeds.

"It's frustrating," Wale said, adding that the parks department has always been responsible and selective with its application of weed and pest controls in the past.

The biggest challenge for the parks department in the short term has been battling weeds on hard surface areas such as paved islands and interlocking brick sidewalks, as well as shrub beds throughout the city, Wale said.

Alternative products have been used but, due to the cost, parks staff have had to resort to using string trimmers to cut vegetation on areas such as traffic islands.

This has brought on other issues, including putting staff in difficult situations when they cut weeds on traffic islands in high-traffic areas, increased emissions from gas powered trimmers and increased labour costs, Wale said.

As well, staff can only spray the environmentally friendly product for limited periods of time, using full respirators, because its smell gives people headaches, he said.

The restrictions on weed and pest controls have removed tools from the parks' department toolbox, Wale said.

"It's a challenge."

Wale said he and his staff are concerned about the environment and do not oppose attempts to reduce the overall use of pesticides.

He added, however, that residents and city staff take pride in Brantford's parks and there is a concern when the integrity of those public spaces is threatened.

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I'm also fighting a losing battle with my lawn. I can pull weeds to some extent but I can't do much about the grubs eating the roots. Thanks to our Nannies in "Toronto The Paved" our neighbourhoods, parks and schools will soon look like urban wastelands and for no good reason. As I recall, this draconian legislation reduced the use of pesticides and herbicides by a mere 5% since farms and golf courses remain exempt. If it can be put on the food that we eat why is it such an evil if we put it on our lawns and gardens. What we need in this province is a total rebellion against this Daddy Knows Best dictatorship we suffer under with McGuinty and his Liberal bobble heads.

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