

Life

Big Brother reaches his dead hand into our gardens

Best [homemade remedies](#) for your garden are . . . sorry, Master Gardeners of Toronto can't tell you that until government says it's OK



SONIA DAY / [TORONTO STAR](#)

Banned: It is now illegal for [Master Gardeners](#) to recommend that gardeners use beer and baking soda to get rid of garden pests.

By: [Sonia Day](#) Gardening, Published on Sat Nov 16 2013

Will baking soda and water control black spot on roses?

Does [neem oil](#) get rid of the dreaded lily beetle on Asiatic lilies?

Can dishes of beer attract slugs away from plants?

Yes to all three. But don't ask a Master Gardener for more information.

It is illegal for them tell you.

Truly. I'm not kidding. The heavy hand of Big Brother is now reaching right into our gardens.

The following email recently went out to the 80 or so women and men who belong to the Master Gardeners of Toronto:

"It is ILLEGAL TO RECOMMEND HOMEMADE REMEDIES FOR [PEST CONTROL](#) A MG in Ontario may not write, advise or recommend to anybody that they use Neem oil, soap, alcohol, baking soda, ketchup or any other concoction that worked for Grandma. Anything we recommend has to be approved by the government as a pesticide."

The caps are theirs, not mine. Presumably, a similar edict has been sent to other Master Gardeners across the province.

But c'mon. Are the pesticide police really going to prosecute me for giving people advice about such things?

If the answer's yes, then I say: bollocks. This government ruling (which appears to have its origins in the Ontario Pesticide Act) is just another example of bureaucracy gone mad.

Many of these so-called "home remedies" (the sniffy term the Ministry of the Environment uses to describe simple [gardening tips](#)) have been around for years. They were used by our grandparents. And they work.

If — as the edict implies — there is something terribly dangerous about resorting to these measures in our gardens now, let's hear what they are. Before taking this Draconian directive seriously, I want proof that they have actually caused harm to someone or something.

The powers-that-be who dreamed up this absurd law should be aware, too, that Master Gardeners are thoughtful, intelligent, well-informed folks, who undergo extensive training before assuming their role of educating the public about gardening. To become an MG, you must first slog through two years of intensive horticulture correspondence courses from the University of Guelph (I know. I did it 20 years ago) then agree to keep learning more at monthly meetings.

We acquire a wealth of useful knowledge — which we're happy to pass on to others for free. (MGs are all volunteers).

We are not a bunch of brainless ninnies who advocate taking damaging or dangerous steps to get rid of pests and diseases in the garden.

Denying people access to what we know is ludicrous. Especially nowadays, when there's a real thirst for information about practical alternatives to conventional pesticides.

Must we — sigh — become fearful of absolutely everything in our lives?

If you agree, please send a protest to minister.moe@ontario.ca

And while you're at it, a copy Toronto Master Gardeners (toronto.mg@hotmail.com) who — distressingly — seem content to seal their lips about the benefits of baking soda and whatnot — and simply bow to what the government wants.

As for me, wanna know a "home remedy" for earwigs?

Whoops. Can't tell you. I see the pesticide police arriving . . .

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