

## **CATEGORY: Macleans.ca**

Brown is beautiful

A green lawn is now a mark of shame. Just don't tell Newfoundland

PETER SHAWN TAYLOR | October 15, 2007 |

Gardening is a classic boomer pastime with lots of upsides -- annual sales of lawn and garden products have risen by 40 per cent over the past four years to hit \$2 billion. But lush lawns and luxuriant gardens are coming under increasing scrutiny for a range of environmental sins ranging from pesticides to over-watering to lawn-mower use. A new report from Statistics Canada sheds some light on Canada's varied gardening habits, and the environmental conundrum they pose.

A green lawn and healthy garden appear to hold the least appeal to Quebecers. Only two-thirds of households in the province have a lawn or garden. Leading the nation are gardeners in the Atlantic provinces of Newfoundland, P.E.I. and New Brunswick, where participation figures exceed 80 per cent.

Quebec's disinterest in gardening spills over to pesticides as well. The use of lawn chemicals fell by half between 1994 and 2005, spurred by a landmark ban on pesticides in the town of Hudson in 1991, later upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada. Last year the Charest government announced a province-wide ban on cosmetic spraying. In Ontario, Premier Dalton McGuinty has pledged a similar law if he wins the current provincial election. However, pesticides have maintained their allure of practicality in other parts of the country. Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba all increased domestic pesticide applications over the past decade; Newfoundland doubled its use.

As for the other deleterious impacts of gardening, StatsCan reports Ontario leads the country in lawn watering. And even Quebec is above the national average for gas-powered lawn mowers, which pollute the air. Groups such as the Canadian Environmental Law Association have lately made lawn care a major focus. "The standardized monoculture green lawn is going by the wayside," states Kathleen Cooper, senior researcher with CELA. "And watering it is unsustainable and wasteful."

Now some in the garden industry fear that brown might become the new green -- dead grass becoming a sign of one's commitment to the environment. Alan

Pinsonneault, president of the Professional Lawn Care Association of Ontario, sees a kind of general apathy creeping over all aspects of yard care. "Some people are giving up on their lawns because of all the regulations and restrictions," he says. "Expectations are changing." Along with brown front yards, he notes city parks, public spaces and even the grass alongside highways are no longer kept up like in the past. "It is sad, really," offers Pinsonneault, saying the trend has practical as well as aesthetic implications. Good turf is much safer for kids to play on than the mud-packed, weed-infested playgrounds that now dot the province.

Environmental puritanism hasn't taken hold everywhere, however. David Carew owns a landscaping company in St. John's, Nfld., where StatsCan says green gardening, of the traditional sort, is still in vogue. "Things have been very busy for the past 10 years," he says contentedly. "Everyone seems interested in their lawns."

A healthy provincial economy might be one reason behind the lawn boom, but Carew suspects a lively sense of neighbourly envy plays a bigger part. One benefit of all this competition is that his province has become a beautiful place to be, he observes. "Things are looking pretty nice and green around here. We have such harsh winters that when the sun does shine, everybody wants to get out and enjoy the garden."