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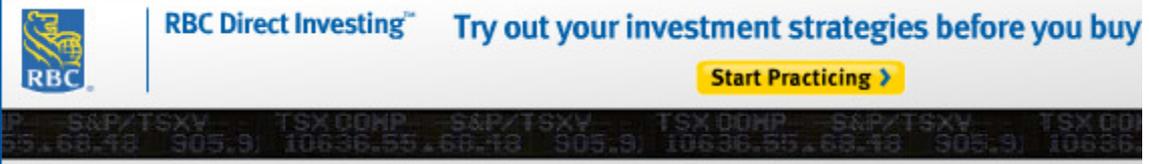
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Peter Shawn Taylor: Keeping Ontario ugly, the natural way

Posted: May 17, 2010, 1:50 PM by NP Editor

[Peter Shawn Taylor](#), [Ontario](#), [pesticides](#)

*Dandelions have become the dominant ground cover for lawns, parks, school yards and sports fields*



**Provincial politicians often promise that their province won't look the same once they're done. Usually, they're talking about taxes, jobs, education or the laws of the land. While these are all important issues, they frankly don't have much physical presence in**

**everyday life. Your street generally looks the same regardless of who's in power.**

Not so in Ontario. Over the past year Premier Dalton McGuinty has managed to alter the physical appearance of his province. Every front yard is now uglier.

It's been a year and a month since the McGuinty government introduced legislation banning the use of pesticides everywhere except golf courses and farms. As a result weeds, primarily dandelions, have become the dominant ground cover for lawns, parks, school yards and sports fields across the province.

It took a while for the full impact of this ban to become apparent. Last year, many lawns seemed to retain vestigial protection against weeds due

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**A note on rea**  
welcomed. We  
the initial post

to previous pesticide treatments. Now, however, the weeds are here to stay. Forever. Residential streetscapes have switched from green to yellow. To white and fluffy. And back to yellow again.

[that dare not speak its name](#)  
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It's important to remember this effort was entirely political. There's no reliable scientific evidence that regulated pesticides, when used correctly, pose any threat to human health. Ignoring the work of the federal government's Pest Management Regulatory Agency, McGuinty blithely declared a sweeping ban was necessary for "our children's health." No other jurisdiction in North America went so far in forbidding chemical weed control.

[enjoy their moment in the sun](#)  
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Yet a weed-free lush grass lawn or field has many practical benefits. For one, grass acts as a natural cushion. It is also an effective sponge for rain water. A sports field entirely overrun by dandelions provides none of these benefits. When it rains it becomes a slippery mud bog. In hot months: a concrete-like surface. Not only does this make it difficult to play sports, but it's dangerous as well. Falling on hard-baked playground mud is, speaking from parental experience, the direct cause of numerous skinned knees and twisted ankles. McGuinty's crusade on behalf of children's health is actually hurting kids on a daily basis.

[Bailing out foolish countries won't fix financial problems](#)

It's also the case that many, most likely a majority, of people consider a uniform green lawn to be a thing of beauty and an object of desire. From this perspective, the pesticide law represents an effort to dictate aesthetics. Various propaganda claims there's nothing wrong with a weedy, yellow-dotted lawn — everyone should simply learn to appreciate the wondrous joys of dandelions. Or put in a rock garden. But that's a matter of opinion. On what basis should the state give itself a mandate over beauty?

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Of course, even the McGuinty government seems to recognize these efforts haven't really convinced homeowners to love ugly lawns. A provincial website also offers tips for a weed-free yard without pesticides. "Pluck weeds by hand," it cheerily declares. "Get a weeding tool and the job will be faster and easier." With more practical options outlawed, this advice appears to have stuck. In my neighbourhood, it seems every second homeowner is now outside on Saturday afternoons diligently plucking and pulling at an endless supply of weeds. No one looks very happy; probably because it's an entirely Sisyphean task.

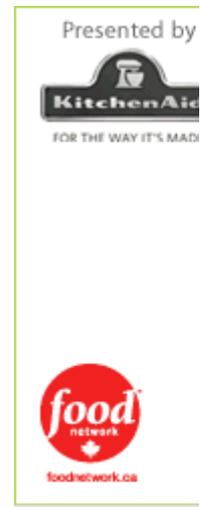
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Curiously, McGuinty has another major preoccupation besides banning things and fretting about children. Earlier this year, his government released a substantial report on the long-term prospects for the economy. Chief among its issues was a commitment to improving productivity. "Encouraging faster productivity growth" was presented as a crucial step to defending the provincial standard of living.

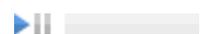
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And yet it is difficult to imagine anything more unproductive than forcing every home owner in the province to abandon a perfectly safe, modern and efficient means of weed control in favour of a method that can only be described as medieval. The ban thus represents an enormous deadweight loss for the province. Even if we assume time spent hand-weeding on weekends would otherwise be allocated to yard maintenance, the provincial net worth could be vastly enhanced if everyone was



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spending those hours painting fences, repairing decks and trimming hedges.

For elderly residents, many of whom take great pride in their gardens and yards, hand pulling may not only be unproductive, but physically impossible. Denied the use of better, labour-saving methods of weed control, many retirees have simply lost the ability to tend to their own yard. All of which suggests we haven't heard the last on this issue. And Heaven help the politician who ends up taking the blame for everyone's ugly lawn.

National Post

*Peter Shawn Taylor is editor-at-large of Maclean's magazine. He lives in Waterloo, Ontario.*

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by JohnnyQuest

May 17 2010

2:20 PM

When life throws you dandelions make...

[www.wikihow.com/Make-Dandelion-Wine](http://www.wikihow.com/Make-Dandelion-Wine)

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by dmn451

May 17 2010

2:26 PM

Chairman Mao will be removed from office next year.

What a decade from hell this has been.

The absolute worst preimer this province has ever seen, and that is saying something, especially after rae's abysmal performance.

I guess that is why rae could slide into the liberal party. Not as bad as some top liberals. Now that's really saying something.

[Chris Selley: Th](#)

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by Tossed Salad

May 17 2010

2:31 PM

I just sprayed with a weed killer about an hour ago on my front yard. I have a stash of 20 bottles of the stuff which will last about twenty years and if it has a shelf life I will just drive over the border to Quebec or the States and purchase it there. F\*\*k You McGuinty. Oh and my back yard is dandelion free as I sprayed there two weeks ago not a word of complaint from neighbors.

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by machinecodeblue

May 17 2010

2:38 PM

Really, i don't get what is so great about lawns, I don't mind a few dandylions and not having chemicals spread about is fine with me.

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politics and th  
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Solomon, Pete

by Chiffer

May 17 2010 2:53 PM	Tossed Salad.  You must be very proud, you freak!	columns from and politics.
<hr/>		
by sometown May 17 2010 3:18 PM	Let's not forget the eco friendly roof for those that want to decrease their carbon foot print. These green roofs feature earth, grass and plants which helps to cool the house in the summer, so goes the claim. Hence, we can expect green roofs to also have dandelions.	<b>Recent Comm</b> <a href="#">Damn , now y for your drink; won't be payin -om5</a> <a href="#">Full Comment</a>
<hr/>		
by Informed One May 17 2010 3:18 PM	Spending money on setting disputes among the plants sounds way too stupid for me. I move and don't worry what, as long as it's below ankle high.  And by the way, Shawn: it's herbicides that kill dandelions, pesticides kill the insects (well, some of them).	<a href="#">A bank tax we Europeans to f their spending proposed...</a> -broke <a href="#">Full Comment</a>
<hr/>		
by dmn451 May 17 2010 3:34 PM	The pesticide ban also includes herbicides and insecticides and fungicides.  Get your power tools soon. I can't see mcguinty leaving office before he has circular saws and hammer drill banned.	<a href="#">I am stunned t to achieve thre for the Liberal</a> -almasy <a href="#">Full Comment</a>  <a href="#">@ Pilgrim as u Like the typic wing religious</a>
<hr/>		
by JFJ May 17 2010 3:40 PM	I'm with Tossed Salad.  Dalton McTaxhee hasn't quite reached the depths of depravity as the econuts responsible for the defacto worldwide ban on the use of DDT. Judicious use of the chemical is the only effective way of controlling the deadly Malaria-carrying mosquitoes. The ban now results in one million African children dying of the disease each year.	<a href="#">-MikeMurphy</a> <a href="#">Full Comment</a>  <b>Recent Posts</b> <a href="#">Don Martin: A</a> -Scott Maniqu <a href="#">Full Comment</a>
<hr/>		
by NBarton May 17 2010 3:46 PM	All is not lost. During coffee this morning at the local coffee shop a long time Liberal friend shocked me to death when he stated that he had had enough of Dalton and his gang. He had cancelled his Liberal membership and was going to support the local conservative member in the next election.	<a href="#">John Ivison: T opposition</a> -Scott Maniqu <a href="#">Full Comment</a>  <a href="#">Gary Clement</a> -Daniel Kaszc <a href="#">Full Comment</a>
<hr/>		
	The reason for the turn around...high taxes, lying, high utility rates and his prize lawn is now full of weeds. Keep up the good work Dalton and your political career will be as dead as the weeds in my lawn...the ones I sprayed!	<a href="#">Ann Phillips: /</a> -NP Editor <a href="#">Full Comment</a>  <b>Politics in full</b>

by Zena Princess  
Warrior  
May 17 2010  
4:53 PM

By the way "Informed One", Shawn is correct in calling a herbicide a pesticide. The term Pesticide is an umbrella term. A herbicide is a pesticide used to control weeds, a insecticide is a pesticide used to control insects, a fungicide is a pesticide used to control fungus and so on.

Unfortunately the Ban in Ontario was politically driven, there is no credible science that supports banning these products.

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by osaycanuc  
May 17 2010  
5:09 PM

My lawn was giving me away. Then, I decided to deal. To the neighbors. From the garage. In the dark of night. Now my lawn does not stand out any longer. See me for your 'dime bags'.

**Comment link**

by Dirt farmer  
May 17 2010  
7:01 PM

A week ago we came back from visiting relatives and friends in the Niagara peninsula and commented to many about the disgusting sight of all the dandelions everywhere. All because of false science. These will choke out the lawn grass in many places.

It will soon be time to change Ontario's provincial flower to the dandelion.

Zena Princess is correct. I have farmed for over 40 years and many city people and dumb politicians such as McGuinty confuse the issue.

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**Full Commen**

by Lester M  
May 17 2010  
7:11 PM

I have grown a vegetable garden for 40 years. Among many other crops, I have always grown enough onions to last all winter. Onions, however, are attacked by onion maggots that devour the bulb from the inside leaving a gooey mess that is inedible. The standard treatment has been a harmless pesticide called Diazanon....

Today, I bought some young onion plants, so I called the Ministry of Agriculture and asked what they are recommending for home gardeners that grow onions - after checking all of her various lists and tip sheets, she advised there is no recommendation....in other words, forget about growing onions and buy them at the grocery store imported from the USA... I don't think I'll even put the plants I bought into the garden - why waste the space?

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Similarly, growing peppers, squash, cucumbers and many other garden crops has become a futile exercise.

This isn't just about pretty lawns - it also affects our ability to produce our own foods !

---

by Denis Pakkala  
May 17 2010  
7:50 PM

I prefer dandelions over poison on my own lawn, but I don't care what other people do. I wonder what Nana McGuinty will ban next.

Interesting to know about onions, Lester, but I've never needed poison for peppers, squash or cucumber.

---

by Sassyllassie  
May 17 2010  
8:47 PM

I use to be against the use of chemicals on my property or on my neighbours and then I met my neighbour, he's certified to spray all kinds of chemicals as a farmer and you know what he makes sense there are weeds, bugs and certain funguses ten times more dangerous than the chemicals he safely uses. I don't use chemicals but what gives me the right to edict that on the person living next to me?

---

by RogersJi  
May 17 2010  
9:12 PM

Stop your shining, you are the people that voted for the McGuinty led Liberals not once but twice. I don't think he was anymore honest the first term than he has been the second term. BTW, I notice all the coal fired power plants were closed years ago and smog in Toronto has disappeared.

Hasn't anyone driven by the McGuintys' lawns to see how they keep their lawns? I'm sure Dolton's environmentalist brother as well as Dolton himself have hand picked every weed in their lawns and gardens. Plus, I'm sure that they have allowed the slugs, potato bugs and sod worms to survive for the goodness of the earth.

BTW, is diatomaceous earth considered a pesticide in Ontario rather than just ground up shells?

---

by Lester M  
May 17 2010  
9:12 PM

Denis - you're lucky, so far - there is a lot of residual protection from previous usage - even if you didn't use it, you had protection from general usage, probably from the nursery before you bought the plants!! -

I figure it will take 5 years for the full impact of this to hit home with people. And, once you are infested, you'll never lose them.... I never had problems with peppers until 2 years ago, and by last year every single pepper had worms in it.

I planted an apricot tree last year - without spray, I'm told I might as well take it out and plant flowers.

But the condo dwellers in Toronto that devise these laws still get their golf courses sprayed to insure nice green perfect lawns!!!

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by Denis Pakkala  
May 17 2010  
10:50 PM

Slug traps and insecticidal soap works for me.  
Dandelions don't bother me.

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by osaycanuc  
May 18 2010  
6:14 AM

Garlic mustard is a rampant, and hugely invasive weed and it is taking over everywhere from native species, spreading south to north in the east. If allowed to go to seed, it grows in carpets. It poisons the earth it grows in, making it difficult for some other plants to survive. It pulls easily when the soil is damp, but if not and you leave some root behind, it comes back bigger. Ungerminated seeds last in the soil up to five years. Conservation authorities recommend killing it. It would have overrun my gardens years ago, as it has some of my neighbors. I keep it out of my yard using Roundup, a safe product which is still legal in Ontario... (it was last year, haven't searched for it this year)... but it IS a pesticide, and without it, I simply could not keep up with this weed. Outside my property, I use a weeder to mow it down en masse just before it seeds. Dandelions are nothing compared to this. All you Easterners, look it up, and learn to identify it.

---

by Zhimmy  
May 18 2010  
7:58 AM

Dinosaurs!

Put less emphasis on growing weeds and more emphasis on growing grass! That's what I did and I have a beautiful lawn right now with a few of the yellow fellows in my yard. That has more to do with me being too lazy to go and pop them out with my weed pulled!

My neighbour on the otherhand still cuts his grass to a 1/2 inch and never overseeds or fertilizes. Its full of the yellow friends.

Do most people even stop to think how our ancestors who were farmers must be laughing at us? We can't grow a 20 by 20 field of grass!

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by ljk70  
May 18 2010  
10:30 AM

[en.wikipedia.org/.../Dandelion](http://en.wikipedia.org/.../Dandelion)

If I still had a lawn, I'd grow nothing but dandelions, just to piss off the people who think they're ugly.

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