

# The Telegraph

## Glyphosate ban: vinegar just doesn't cut the mustard with hard-core bindweed (or gardeners)

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Glyphosate, marketed as Roundup, is beloved by many gardeners

I like vinegar. A generous dash over the battered fish. Nothing better. But would I want my local council spraying tanks of the stuff around the streets in an attempt to ward off weeds? No. So I understand the bemusement in Bristol, where the city authorities have sworn off chemical weedkillers in favour of a “natural” vinegar solution. Apparently the whole place smells like a chip shop.

Not that there is anything wrong with using vinegar: I use it on moss in my garden, and it burns off annual weeds. But it won't be as effective as the chemical alternative – glyphosate (more commonly known as Roundup) – which is beloved by many gardeners for tackling notorious bogey species such as ground elder and bindweed. These are the pests that have brittle, spontaneously regenerating, perennial roots that infuriatingly infest and get entangled in garden plants.

You can see why you might want to avoid chemical weedkiller. The International Agency for Research on Cancer recently decided that glyphosate is “probably carcinogenic to humans”. But, then, it has given the same designation to coffee, mobile phones, aloe vera extract and – yes, really – pickled vegetables. Since then, the European Food Safety

Authority has decided that the stuff is actually “unlikely to pose a carcinogenic hazard to humans”.

**“Just the mention of a word like glyphosate is enough to have some yogurt eaters hissing as they would a pantomime villain”**

The reality is that this is not a dispute about cancer but about our infatuation with “natural” products and solutions. And when we are reduced to spraying condiments on our city streets, I suggest that infatuation has gone too far.

This is the kind of debate that always pits homespun remedies (good) against chemicals (bad). Just the mention of a word like glyphosate is enough to have some yogurt eaters hissing as they would a pantomime villain. No doubt they also favour herbal poultices and the application of leeches over a course of antibiotics. But some chemicals are great. Glyphosate kills any undesirable perennial greenery on contact without rendering the ground unusable for weeks afterwards. It saves gardeners many hours of back-breaking forking around.



Glyphosate is brilliant at tackling notorious bogey species such as ground elder and bindweed

These benefits, however, have not been enough to prevent Waitrose from being pressured into removing glyphosate products from its shelves. This despite the fact that traces of the chemical are apparently present in the bread it sells (because the chemical is also used by farmers as a pre-harvest desiccant to increase yields).

**“They’ll be forcing us to mow the lawn with a scythe next”**

This is all the wrong way round. If we want to ban chemical weedkiller, we should restrict its use in agriculture, so it doesn't get into our food. But don't punish us innocent gardeners by proscribing one of our most effective "little helpers". Our beloved activity keeps us fit and gives us a great feeling of well-being. In an age where just about everything else we do is deemed "dangerous" (don't get me started on the health and safety lot), it should be heartily encouraged. And though we may enjoy a glass or two after the pruning is done, we gardeners are a pretty responsible bunch. Most of us proudly, consciously, do our bit recycling and composting. We don't want to drench the place in weedkiller, but we want to have recourse to a little squirt here and there. It's a modern convenience. What's wrong with that? They'll be forcing us to mow the lawn with a scythe next.