

Gardening on the Prairies made easy.  
[Subscribe Today](#)

[MEMBERS AREA](#)
[EVENTS](#)
[PIX](#)
[CLUBS](#)
[KidzKorner](#)
[ARTICLES](#)
[BOOKS](#)
[SUPPLIERS](#)
[LINKS](#)
[HELP](#)

[LATEST FROM](#)
[BY CATEGORY](#)
[FEATURE ARTICLES](#)
[HOT HORT ISSUES](#)

**ARTICLES**

Documents: Latest From: **Art Drysdale:**

## Grass, Hydrangea & Pesticides


Grass amongst periwinkle and keeping a 'Nikko Blue' Hydrangea blue are among the questions, plus another general press viewpoint on the fallacy of a pesticide, or insecticide ban.  
 by Art Drysdale

by **Art Drysdale**


email: [art@artdrysdale.com](mailto:art@artdrysdale.com)

Art Drysdale, a life-long resident of Toronto and a horticulturist well known all across Canada, is now a resident of Parksville, British Columbia on Vancouver Island, just north of Nanaimo. He has renovated an old home and has a new garden there. His radio gardening vignettes are heard in south-western Ontario over two radio stations: Easy 101 FM out of Tillsonburg at 2 PM weekdays and CD98.9 FM out of Norfolk County at 11:40 AM weekdays.

Art also has his own website at <http://www.artdrysdale.com>



June 1, 2003



*Two shots of Hydrangea macrophylla 'Bailmer', commonly known as Hydrangea Endless Summer™ that will be available across Canada at least by next spring.*

Last week I wrote at length about the so-called pesticide ban in Toronto, which is NOT a ban at all. I also quoted several excerpts from Toronto's *Globe & Mail*. Since I wrote that, the Toronto *Sun*'s Connie Woodcock wrote a piece that not only concurred with what I have been saying for several decades about the banning of 2,4-D, but went further back to the banning of DDT, and Rachael Carson's infamous book, *Silent Spring*.

I decided that I could do no better than to quote extensively from Connie Woodcock's article so herewith!

"We have Toronto city council obsessing for days before banning cosmetic use of pesticides while municipalities across Canada watch anxiously. Hysteria is in the air. Only last weekend, I read a reporter's overwrought description of the death (by 2,4-D) of a dandelion that employed terms you might use to describe a torture chamber. Writes the *Globe*'s Martin Mittelstaedt: 'A gruesome fate awaits any weed that comes into contact with the compound, which is man-made but behaves like a plant hormone on steroids. Its victims basically grow themselves to death. Stems twist and contort, roots swell and leaves wither and die, a familiar sight to anyone who has observed dandelions on a recently sprayed lawn.'

"Oh, please. Spare us. It's bad enough that animal rights nuts anthro-po-morphize cats, dogs and baby seals, giving them human thoughts and emotions, don't do it to dandelions.

"On a (slightly) more serious note, an old neighbour of mine has been stockpiling pesticide in his basement ever since Hudson, Quebec voted to ban the stuff a couple of years ago. A ban, he figures, is just a matter of time for all of us, not just those of you who live in Toronto. It will be like DDT.

"You remember DDT. It was banned in the '70s and remains the environmentalists' favourite example of a harmful chemical. In Rachel Carson's famous book, *Silent Spring*, DDT was indicted for killing everything from seagulls to songbirds. The U.S. banned the stuff in 1972. It is long gone from most western countries.

Too bad it wasn't true. Used properly, there was never a real problem with DDT -- and plenty of good. It killed malaria-spreading mosquitoes and the World Health Organization estimates it saved 25 million lives world-wide. Malaria was on its way to being eliminated -- but then along came the chemical police. More than one million people worldwide still die annually of malaria, 90% of them in Africa. Ill-informed public opinion -- not scientific fact -- killed DDT. That shows you the power of junk science.

"But DDT's reputation has begun to make a comeback. Stories about it and its ill-deserved fate have begun appearing. There has even been an editorial in The New York *Times*.

"What happened to DDT is the same thing that's happening now with the common insecticides and herbicides we use to keep our lawns and gardens healthy. There is no proof these chemicals, when sprayed on a lawn, cause cancer or anything else. But when you read stories about them, you often read sentences that begin something like this: 'Scientists suspect ...' Or 'there's a growing body of evidence that suggests ...' Even Toronto's board of health, the same people who told restaurateurs to build smoking rooms and then ordered them taken out, is unable to point to a single definitive study. If you don't believe me, go look up the pages and pages of reports on the subject on the city's Website.

"So here we are in the spring of 2003, with the tourist business dead (thanks to SARS), thousands of families frightened (by the brutal murder of a child), the food industry about to be ruined (by mad cow disease) and a new bad news report from Canada on CNN every night. And what are we doing? We're obsessing about the right to life for ragweed and dandelions and grubs.

"Are we crazy? Don't we have better things to do?"

**FREE Gardener's Idea Book**

**BC GREENHOUSE BUILDERS LIMITED**

**FISKARS®**

**Great Books for Your Garden**

**gardenimport.com**

**Plantskydd®**

**Alberta Gardener**

**Ontario Gardener**

**Ads by Google**

**How to make Electricity**  
 \$198 Shocking new homeowner's kit has Power Co Exec's red in the face  
[www.Power-4-Homes.co](http://www.Power-4-Homes.co)

**Rockwood Gardens**  
 Premium Perennials for Your Garden at Rock Bottom Prices - Shop Now!  
[www.RockwoodGardens.com](http://www.RockwoodGardens.com)

**RELATED articles**

- Endless Summer® Blushing Bride
- Endless Summer® The Original
- Hydrangea Mountainash Knotweed & Live Chat
- Hydrangea Buds Mysterious Insect & Squirrels

**forum**

"Toronto's public spaces are a mess right now. There's trash on the streets, weeds growing up between the cracks in the pavement, graffiti sprouting like crabgrass, grassy areas overgrown because there's no one to trim them. I could go on and on.

"And that's the way it is without a spraying bylaw. Imagine how ugly Toronto will look when the residential neighbourhoods look the same way."

All that I can add to that is Amen!

The four-day run of the Chelsea Flower Show was held in London England a week ago, and my good London friend Bob Corbin was not able to attend--it would have been his 51st such show. He is recuperating from a fall. Meanwhile, the princess of gardening websites, Donna Dawson, did attend, and via her husband Tom, she observed, "*I was sure impressed this year with the gardens and displays--as you know Chelsea had been losing its lustre over the past number of years as the gardens became almost haute gardening versus real gardening--this year Chelsea came back to its early shine.*"

I'll try to have Donna on my programme next week, and you can be sure that she'll be putting at least her initial comments on the [www.ICanGarden.com](http://www.ICanGarden.com) Website this Sunday.

When I first signed up to attend The Niagara Parks Commission School of Gardening (now the NPC Botanical Garden and School of Horticulture), the indenture we signed, as I recall, talked about the art, science and mystery of gardening". It is certainly true that few areas of everyday human activity mingle science and artistry so intimately as gardening. It seems appropriate then that a major plant-science institute--the John Innes Centre in Norwich, England--won a gold medal at the internationally renowned Chelsea Show.

According to *Nature* magazine, "The John Innes Centre's exhibit was something of a departure: half of it filled with diseased and dying plants, half with healthy vibrant ones. The juxtaposition highlighted the pests and pathogens that attack gardens and crops.

"The display explored the tactics used by viruses, bacteria, fungi and insects to attack plants, and the defences that plants mount to repel these assaults. These include mechanisms to silence invaders' genes, chemicals to forewarn neighbouring plants, and even natural soaps, such as those produced by oats and tomatoes to beat back fungi.

"There 'is much to learn about natural plant resistance,' says Ray Mathias, head of the John Innes Centre's science communication and education department. He hoped that the display would show that 'there are many opportunities to improve natural disease resistance and thus reduce our reliance on pesticides'.

"Ray Mathias points out that the web of interactions between plants, pathogens and pests in our back gardens is like the intrigue played out every evening on our televisions. Hence the winning display's title: "Garden Soaps--intimacy, deceit and betrayal in the plant world."

Obviously this topic has a direct tie-in with the previous one of premature bans on chemicals.

Ken Horton, of Collingwood, wrote with the following question: "I have a gardening problem I'm not sure how to handle. I have a bed of periwinkle, 20x40, under trees, which has been established for many years. It now has a lot of grass through it which I would like removed. Is it necessary to do this by hand to protect the periwinkle? A long painstaking job. I would appreciate your answer and thank you for it."

Unfortunately, even with the chemicals we have today, there is no simple answer to ease Ken's chore. In theory once the periwinkle (*Vinca minor*) has established, its denseness should prohibit grass and other weeds from germinating, and even smother perennial grasses, which is likely what Ken has. The only real solution is hand pulling, best done when the soil is super-saturated with moisture so that you have a better chance of getting more of the roots.

Derrick Keene, who doesn't say from whence he writes (I hope it's in zone 5 or warmer), asked: "I recently had the courage to purchase one of my dream perennials. It is a 'Nikko Blue' *Hydrangea*. I don't want to blow it. I had purchased a bag of acidic soil that has been around for about 7 years. I have soil acidifier (CIL *Aluminium sulphate*) and plan to water with Miracid. If I use all three in combination, will I endanger the life of the hydrangea?"

Fast answer to that Derrick: no, all three of those combined should cause no problem. And, depending on how alkaline your present garden soil is/was, you may have to add the *Aluminium sulphate* annually.

For those who want a more reliable (read hardier) blue-flowered *Hydrangea*, the new Endless Summer™ is about to become available. I've written about this at least twice previously. It should be in garden centres this autumn or next spring for sure.

1. RE: hydrangea
2. RE: Potted hydrangea
3. RE: Blue Hydrangea
4. RE: Ideas for Deep Shade Shrubs
5. RE: Ideas for Deep Shade Shrubs

[MORE](#)

Ads by Google

#### Sunshine Grounds Care

North America's  
Grounds Care Team  
We Care, All Year!  
[www.SunshineLandscap](http://www.SunshineLandscap)

#### Small-group garden tours

We specialise in small  
-group garden tours,  
throughout Britain.  
[www.adderleytravel.com](http://www.adderleytravel.com)



[ABOUT US](#)

[MEMBER LOGIN](#)

[PRIVACY POLICY](#)

