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Is This the Beginning of the Americanization of Gardening in Canada?

by Art Drysdale

by **Art Drysdale**

email: 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>

March 14, 2010

Snapshot Voice Blog

Art | 4 all your gardening questions



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Art's 83rd voice blog post

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Back in the mid-eighties I well remember a so-called garden writer from the U.S. coming to Canada on a regular basis as a paid "expert" on the behalf of a consumer home show. He was formerly a Detroit police officer, and had published several books containing ridiculous suggestions for the control of pests and other gardening chores. The suggestions included "special formulas" that contained odd ingredients including beer.

I have not heard of him lately, and was thankful that most of the advice being offered to Canadians for their gardening was by Canadians (although that advice offered by some ex-pats remains questionable!).

Last week I learned that history is repeating itself with the importation of one Paul Tukey coming to Canada for several speaking engagements and to introduce his not-so-great home-made video called *A Chemical Reaction* which includes his interpretation of just what happened in Hudson, Québec that was the beginning of banning chemical pesticides in Canada.

This thing with Paul Tukey seems to have started back on September 6, 2008, when I received the following e-mail message from him: "I would like to interview you for a book I am writing about the history of the lawn care industry in North America. Would you have some time for such a pursuit? All the best."

I responded on September 9th as follows: "Yes, I could do that at some point, but I should point out that I am not exactly a supporter of organic-only lawn care! Did you wish to do it by telephone?"

He then responded on the 10th: "Our first conversation should be by phone. That would be fine. Just give me a time. Thank you. I would like to talk about Milton Carelton and his and your views on 2-4, D."

I found it interesting that a supposed radio, TV and print journalist would not only spell Dr. R. Milton Carleton's name incorrectly, but also miss-spell the short form name of the weed-control chemical 2,4-Dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4-D)!

By the time I wrote back to him I had already checked him out both on the Web and also in the Membership Directory of the Garden Writers Association of America (of which I am the only Canadian to have been President [1979-81]). Though I have not continued my membership (because I do not believe the organization does as much for writers as it used to), I do remain in close contact with certain old-time members. My own membership goes back to the mid 60s, whereas I note Paul Tukey has only been a member since 2005. I was also a close friend of GWAA member the late Dr. R. Milton Carleton. As I have written previously, I used to see him at least two times per year, including annually at the Chicago Flower Show. When I began to encounter opposition to 2,4-D in Ontario in the 90s (and even earlier) I wrote to Milt (as we affectionately called him) and here follows what he wrote back to me.

"I probably know more about the history and use of this chemical than anyone alive. Dr. Franklin D. Jones, who discovered its phytochemical properties and patented its use as a control for unwanted plants, walked into my office right after WWII.

"He said he had a marvellous weed killer for drive[way]s. My answer was 'Frank, we have plenty of chemicals that will do that--even old crank case oil will do the job. What we need is a better control for crabgrass!'

"'Unfortunately,' he replied, 'it doesn't do too good a job on grasses; in fact they don't die unless you use so much that I suspect it's the carrier that kills, not the 2,4-D.'

"This set me to thinking--if it doesn't kill crabgrass, maybe it won't kill bluegrass, which



Above: Three shots of our new fence along the street side of the property; first the gate, then the view to the east and west of the gates. Below, one shot of the west portion from the garden. Now we have lots of planting and transplanting to do! Author photos.

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proved to be true when I ran tests. That was the birth of modern selective weed killers.”

'Milt' usually carried a flask around with him that contained 2,4-D from which he would drink on request "just to prove it harmless." Anyone who knew the distinctive smell of 2,4-D knew that he was actually drinking the real stuff. It didn't seem to harm him too much—he lived to the age of 87, and almost up to the end, drove annually from Chicago to his summer home off the US east coast. He moved to Sarasota, Florida in 1980.

The product was definitely NOT developed to eradicate rice fields. (as was stated in the April 23, 2004 Ontario College of Family Physicians [OCFP] 'Review of the effects of pesticides on humans').

2,4-D is a highly improbable herbicide to be used to "eradicate" rice. In fact, it very quickly became the world's most widely used rice herbicide, used to protect rice from yield-destroying invasive weeds. It is still extensively used by Japanese rice growers today. It has been an important tool used to increase rice production worldwide (and the production of wheat, barley, corn, oats, rye, etc.) and thus having a significant impact on reducing world hunger. That so-called fact as stated in the OCFP report alone makes the entire 'review' suspect. And, a closer examination reveals that nothing of what is presented should even be considered.

So now we have Paul Tukey (said to be a failed and bankrupt lawn care operator who was apprehended by local authorities for applying pest control products without the necessary licensing, according to Force of Nature) coming to Canada with a bunch of lies, scare tactics and innuendos and attempting to take supremacy over what a distinguished scientist like Milt Carleton continued to defend all through his life in a very effective way.

By the way, it is thought by many that the reason Tukey is coming up here at this time is that some of the activists in Ontario and elsewhere have decided not to take as strident actions as they have been doing simply because of the threatened and ongoing lawsuits against both organizations and individuals. Solution: bring in an American who will be free of actions by we Canadians.

That also brings up another interesting point. When Tukey returns to the U.S. will he be reporting his 'profits' both direct payments and other 'goodies' he received in Canada to the Canadian and/or American tax authorities? I understand he does not accept a penny for any of these appearances; instead he has all such monies directed to his little business "SafeLawns" and thus tax-free.

I believe Paul Tukey ought to have been banned from entry to Canada since he is clearly trying to interfere with the court fights which are currently going on here with regard to the banning of 2,4-D and other 'cosmetic lawn chemicals' both in Ontario, and against the federal government (by Dow AgroSciences) as regards the banning in Québec.

The worst of this whole mess is that if they remain successful, the enviro-maniacs will go after items such as chemical fertilizers next, and non-native plants will not be far behind that. Do we want that? If folks do not want to use the perfectly safe, Canadian-government approved chemicals to control weeds and other garden problems, then they are welcome to do so. But those who wish to go a simpler route should have the right to do so, and not be dictated to by a small bunch of enviro-maniacs who know little or nothing about the very large topic on which they profess to be experts!

And, we don't need any further Americanization of gardens and gardening here in Canada. Just ask any American tourist what they think of our gardens and cities vs. theirs in the U.S.!

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1. [Taylor's Weekend Gardening Guide to SAFE AND EASY LAWN CARE: The Complete Guide to Organic Low-Maintenance Lawns](#) by Barbara Ellis
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