

Attack of the dandelions: How Edmonton is fighting back this summer

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Travis Kennedy, general supervisor, open space operations for the city, inspects the results of an iron chelate application and mowing on the dandelion population at an Argyll Park sports field, 69 Avenue and 88 Street, in Edmonton on Thursday, May 17, 2018. David Bloom / Postmedia

The city is hoping to get ahead of the looming dandelion influx after a walloping 2017 weed season by starting herbicide application this week on 60 per cent of Edmonton's sports fields.

Crews began applying the alternative herbicide iron chelate on Monday and are treating up to 20 fields every day, the city said Thursday. The first round of application is set to be complete in the next few weeks, said Travis Kennedy, general supervisor of open space operations.

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In December 2017, city council voted to invest \$3 million for turf maintenance including the purchase and use of the herbicide and increased mowing cycles.

"The City of Edmonton uses mowing to reduce the appearance of dandelions. We attempt to mow before the dandelions go to seed to help reduce the spread of the weed," he said.

Increased mow cycles are taking place across all of the city's open spaces — about 4,000 hectares — with weekly mowing running from this week until the beginning of July, Kennedy said

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The city began using the eco-herbicide last summer as the weeds became unbearable. The herbicide is a federally regulated product, Kennedy said, and adheres to a number of stringent guidelines.

"It dries quickly, does not have a strong odour, does not leave a chemical residue on the grass and poses negligible health and environmental risks," he said.

Following application, Kennedy said the treated weeds will turn a dark red colour, but are safe to touch when dry and grass growth isn't impacted.

Sports fields and play surfaces are an exception to the city's cosmetic herbicide ban and can be treated, Kennedy said.

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"On this type of turf, we measure the density of weeds and, once they cross the threshold, then we apply iron chelate herbicide," he said.

Vegetation teams are currently prioritizing the city's fields, he said, based on the density of weeds.

Signs will be posed on fields that have been sprayed, Kennedy said, and will include a time for when it is safe to resume use.

This process can take as little as 30 minutes or up to four hours depending on weather conditions.

"Assess the field, apply the herbicide and then, post-application, the sign goes up so folks know what's been applied and when they can go back on the field," Kennedy said of the process.

High-weed density fields could have up to four applications throughout the season, Kennedy said. The second application will begin at least 21 days following the initial treatment.

The crews will be back on the fields in August and September for the third and fourth applications on the treated fields.

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