

Two Neighbors, Two Wildly Different Views of Lawn Care



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Ontario, Canada, is about 30 miles due north of my home as the crow flies. I have traveled there and elsewhere in that large province several times, and have found that the people there are very much like the people in my Ohio neighborhood.

When it comes to our lawns, however, we might as well be on opposite sides of the world.

For example, I can hire a lawn care company to fertilize and apply chemical products to my lawn. I can also buy these same herbicides and insecticides at the local hardware store and use them on my property. Ontarians cannot. Several years ago, Ontario prohibited the use and retail sale of these same products, many of which had been used for years, if not decades, there.

That's why I find what's been going on in Canada these past 20 years regarding the use of lawn care products so strange. The country is riddled with a patchwork of laws restricting the use of common lawn care products. Laws differ from town to town and region to region. Ontario's ban is pretty straightforward: it bans just about all the active ingredients that we in the states use.

To me, these prohibitions appear to be nonsense, at least based on the science as I've studied it. The same goes for the argument that these lawn care products are used merely for "cosmetic" purposes, are therefore nonessential, and, for that reason, must be removed from the market. What's wrong with making our properties more attractive? And this, ignoring the researched societal, economic and environmental benefits that vigorous, weed-free turfgrass on our home lawns, sports fields and parks provides to our communities.

Self-anointed pesticide experts and organizations with impressive-sounding names keep the anti-lawn care rhetoric hot in Canada. It seems no community there is spared their crusading efforts. They're always able to fire up supporters within the communities they target. While many of these individuals almost certainly believe they're advancing the greater good, I've read little evidence that they have little real knowledge of turfgrass or the products that can keep it safely and affordably healthy and attractive.

The motives of some of the individuals and organizations trumpeting their anti-lawn care agendas are less transparent. They almost seem to have turned bashing the lawn care specialty chemical industry into a cottage industry in terms of raising funds, landing speaking gigs and, in one case, selling books and a movie.

Good work if you can get it, right?

Sadly and too often, lawmakers sensing opportunities for political advantage or, in some cases, buckling to the anti-pesticide fervor that these individuals and organizations stir up, agree to this silliness.

Admittedly, I find it hard to understand how the citizens of two countries that have so much in common, have gone down such divergent paths in terms of this particular issue.

Curious about how Canada became riddled with such a hodgepodge of pesticide laws? Check out the timeline below and see how a single controversy in a small town in Quebec Province in 1991 started it all.

- **1991** – Town of Hudson, Quebec, passes a pesticide bylaw, the first example of a local government restricting the use of pesticides. In 1992, two lawn care companies challenge the validity of the bylaw. In a 2001 ruling, the Supreme Court of Canada upholds the bylaw, ruling that municipalities in most provinces have the right to regulate and restrict pesticide use.
- **2003** – Quebec passes the first provincial pesticide ban. It bans the use of 20 active ingredients and was fully phased-in by 2006.
- **2008** – Ontario's Cosmetic Pesticide Ban Act is passed in 2008 and implemented in 2009. The ban includes 96 active ingredients.
- **2009** – New Brunswick bans the use and sale of pesticide products containing 2,4-D, as well as fertilizer-herbicide products. Also, Dow AgroSciences and the Government of Canada reach an agreement in a NAFTA arbitration agreement. The Government of Quebec must make a public statement that products containing 2,4-D do not pose an unacceptable risk to human health or the environment when used properly. However, Quebec chooses to continue its ban.
- **2010** – Prince Edward Island implements a pesticide ban and synchronizes its rules with New Brunswick. Alberta bans fertilizer-herbicide combination products, contending that weed-and-feed product use results in overuse of 2,4-D and threatens the health of waterways.
- **2011** – Nova Scotia's Non-essential Pesticides Control Act comes into effect in April 2011 with regard to lawns, and will expand in 2012 to

include ornamental plants. This ban maintains a list of allowable pesticides; all others are prohibited for cosmetic purposes.

- **2012** – Newfoundland and Labrador institute a ban on the sale and use of products containing five active ingredients on lawns. The new regulations went into effect on May 1, 2012.

In February 2010, the PMRA concluded that fertilizer-pesticide combination products for lawn and turf do not support the goals of best practices for pest management on turf, so the PMRA set the last date of sale for these products for Dec. 31, 2012.

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