

## **Weeds in your lawn**

In today's world, the cost of having a perfect "weed-free" lawn, both economically and environmentally, is very high, which is why it is so important for you to determine your level of weed tolerance before defining a plan of action.

At the outset, it is important to know that it is difficult for weeds to take hold in a very dense lawn of adequate length. In fact, a lawn that is suddenly overrun with weeds is a lawn that has been weakened for a variety of reasons (poor gardening conditions, soil that is depleted, acidic or overly compact, etc.). Applying good gardening methods will help you counter the problem.



Photo: C. Roy

Dandelions at spring

Whether it's dandelions, plantain, crabgrass, strawberry plants or Creeping Charlie, weeds often take over where grass is already struggling. In Rosemère, the soil is heavy and compact in a number of places, due mainly to its high clay content. These conditions tend to favour the growth of weeds with large, pivoting roots like dandelions and plantain, as well as the proliferation of Creeping Charlie. Others, like strawberry plants, do particularly well in depleted or acidic soil. In these cases, fertilize well using natural products and add lime to restore the soil's pH balance. A soil test (provided by many gardening centres) can help you opt for the most effective solution.

Currently, one of the greatest challenges is keeping lawn sections damaged by grubs from being exposed to weeds too long. In fact, if you wait too long to reseed these patches, annual weeds will take root, including the highly allergenic ragweed or crabgrass, which are very hard to eliminate. These weeds must be ripped out as quickly as possible in the spring, before they have a chance to bloom or produce seeds.

A bit of advice: if you buy a low-impact herbicide treatment such as TOPGUN or ECO CLEAR, available at garden centres, use the proper concentrations and avoid putting too much on the lawn, since they often eliminate all vegetation, without distinction. These products are better suited for eliminating weeds that grow between paving stones or close to the asphalt.



Photo: C. Roy

Wild strawberry plant

Ripping weeds out by hand remains the most effective as well as the most ecological way of ridding yourself of these unwanted plants. A tip: after removing the weed, fill the hole with a mixture of earth and lawn seeds. That way, the empty space won't invite another intruder. For your information, a number of contractors now offer this service.

### **About white clover:**

White clover, which some like and others don't, lives quite happily among the blades of grass. However, it does tend to take over in dry or depleted soils. To maintain a fine balance between the two, adopt good gardening practices. If you are one of those who favour this variety because it requires little maintenance and remains green during heatwaves, remember that it will take better if seeding is done in the spring. Unfortunately, white clover is more sensitive to freezing when not covered with snow in winter.

### About corn gluten meal:

Corn gluten meal keeps weed seeds from germinating (dandelion, plantain, crabgrass), but it is not a herbicide per se. Consequently, it does not affect the grass or other vegetation already in the lawn. It should be applied in the spring, when the lilacs start to bloom. However, if you are planning to re-seed your lawn, you must wait until the fall, since this product will also keep grass seeds from germinating. You can also apply corn gluten meal in early September. It is important to use it in moderation, though, especially if you have already fertilized, since it is high in nitrogen.

### And what about herbicides?

Municipal bylaws prohibit the use of synthetic herbicides to suppress lawn weeds. The Québec Pesticides Management Code, which went into effect in April 2006, is also highly restrictive when it comes to the use of pesticides.

If your lawn maintenance contractor offers you a miracle cure for your weed product, be wary! Chances are it won't make your dandelions curl up and die, unless of course, some chemical pesticides have been added to the mix. It happens more often than you might think!

Some new low-impact herbicides such as Sarritor (fungus that attacks plants), Fiesta (iron chelate also marketed under the name "Scott's Weed B-Gone") and Organo Sol (containing citric and lactic acids), can also be offered by contractors but are not applied in a traditional fashion.

At this time, despite the constant marketing of new low-impact products, **there is no truly effective selective ecological product** (one that will eliminate weeds only). So, if you happen to detect the odour of chemical products in your neighbourhood, contact the eco-consultant at the Technical Services and Public Works Department, 450 621-3500, ext. 3305.

### For additional information:

-Lévesque Micheline, 2008. *L'écopelouse – Pour une pelouse vraiment écologique*. Bertrand Dumont éditeur inc., 192 pages.

-Lévesque Micheline, 2005. *Le guide complet des pesticides à faible impact et autres solutions naturelles*. Isabelle Quentin éditeur, 214 pages.

Health Canada website on lawns:

[www.healthylawns.net/](http://www.healthylawns.net/) (bilingual)

Québec Pesticides Management Code website:

[www.mddep.gouv.qc.ca/pesticides/inter\\_en.htm](http://www.mddep.gouv.qc.ca/pesticides/inter_en.htm) (English)

Pest Management Regulatory Agency website:

[www.pmr-arla.gc.ca/english/index-e.html](http://www.pmr-arla.gc.ca/english/index-e.html) (English)

Website of the *ministère du Développement durable, de l'Environnement et des Parcs du Québec*, Document sur la toxicité des produits (document regarding the toxicity of products):

[www.mddep.gouv.qc.ca/pesticides/commercial.pdf](http://www.mddep.gouv.qc.ca/pesticides/commercial.pdf)