

# Landscaper rallies for pesticide-free lawns

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RECORD STAFF

## WATERLOO REGION

A ban on pesticides would force people to rethink what a healthy lawn should look like, says the owner of a local firm specializing in alternative landscapes.

"People think of a lawn as a monoculture, but traditionally a lawn has been a mixture of low green plants," says Derek Lippert, also a member of Kitchener's environmental committee.

That doesn't mean having three varieties of Kentucky blue grass, but it could mean having yarrows, clover and maybe thyme.

Lippert said it is time to relearn our old ways and sense of esthetics.

His vision of what lawns should look like doesn't wash with Bonnie Munson.

Munson has a hectare of lawn at her North Dumfries Township home and she doesn't want to give it up.

Munson, a former school teacher, said school yards turned to mud when pesticide use stopped.

"Now, there's nowhere for kids to play after it rains except for pavement. Mud gets into the classroom and turns to dust and that creates an unhealthy environment for kids."

She won't be converting her lawn into a wildflower garden anytime soon.

"I like to play badminton when friends come over." And suntanning in metre-high grass just won't work, she said.

The issue comes down to a personal choice, Munson said.

"I don't want anyone telling me

what I can do in my own backyard. If they ban this, what's next?"

Munson said she does her bit for the environment. She has planted 65 trees on her property and feeds the birds on a regular basis.

But Lippert said it's only a matter of time before a bylaw restricting pesticide use is passed, and the lawn-care industry and people like Munson should be ready.

Waterloo Region is about to begin a consultation period when public views will be heard on a possible bylaw or ban. The proposed bylaw would only permit pesticide use if a permit is obtained from the region.

Lippert likens the lawn-care industry to a mythical king who stands on the shore, commanding the waves to stop rolling.

"They see the tide coming in a way they don't like and they are commanding it to stop rolling, but there's too much momentum."

He said there may be no proof of a link between pesticides and cancer or other health problems.

"But you can't tell me it is good for me. . . To be dumping tonnes and tonnes of them into a shared environment doesn't make a whole lot of sense."

Patrick O'Toole recently sold his lawn-care business and blames the anti-pesticide campaign for a business that went bad.

"I got out of the business because of the pesticide thing," said O'Toole, who has also served on the Kitchener environmental committee. "It really hurt me and killed new sales."

O'Toole said he's tired of the indus-



Derek Lippert sits in front of a garden he created in front of the Waterloo Region headquarters on Frederick Street. No pesticides were used in the garden.

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try being demonized.

"We didn't invent the concept of what a lawn should look like, we just try to provide what the customer wants."

O'Toole said his company had more than 4,000 customers and only a dozen requested organic treatments.

Lippert doesn't have a good answer for people who say they still want to keep a manicured lawn supported by the use of pesticides. "They might have to change their idea of what a lawn is."

"We find ourselves irrigating with

potable water, burning fossil fuels in power equipment, applying pesticides and fertilizers by the truckload and paying to ship off leaves and grass clippings to our landfills."

Lippert said the North American lawn consumes resources in amounts comparable to all other crops combined, yet it's a crop with no product.

He said he doesn't believe he has a conflict of interest by sitting on Kitchener's environmental committee and being the owner of a land-

scape design company.

"When I joined the environmental committee I thought I may have had a conflict and thought I would keep opinions to myself, but when one of the main spokesmen for the lawn-care industry (O'Toole) was on the committee I sort of thought it wasn't much of an issue."

Lippert said the pesticide issue is just one of many that the committee debates.

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