

# Taking the spray OUT OF PLAY

*Some municipalities  
still using pesticides*

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Are you concerned your children may be playing on sports fields sprayed with harmful pesticides?

While many municipalities have cut back on their use of pesticides, some still spray to keep sports fields free of broadleaf weeds such as dandelions.

East Gwillimbury and Richmond Hill still spray sports fields.

When broadleaf weeds become wet, they can become slippery, posing a safety risk for children playing in fields, said Kelly Williams, parks and recreation manager for East Gwillimbury.

However, he said pesticides are used "only as a last resort, only when absolutely necessary."

East Gwillimbury has been pursuing "a fairly aggressive strategy for pesticide reduction," he said.

Tracey Steele, director of operations of maintenance for Richmond Hill said the town has stringent processes to determine when pesticides should be used on playing and soccer fields.

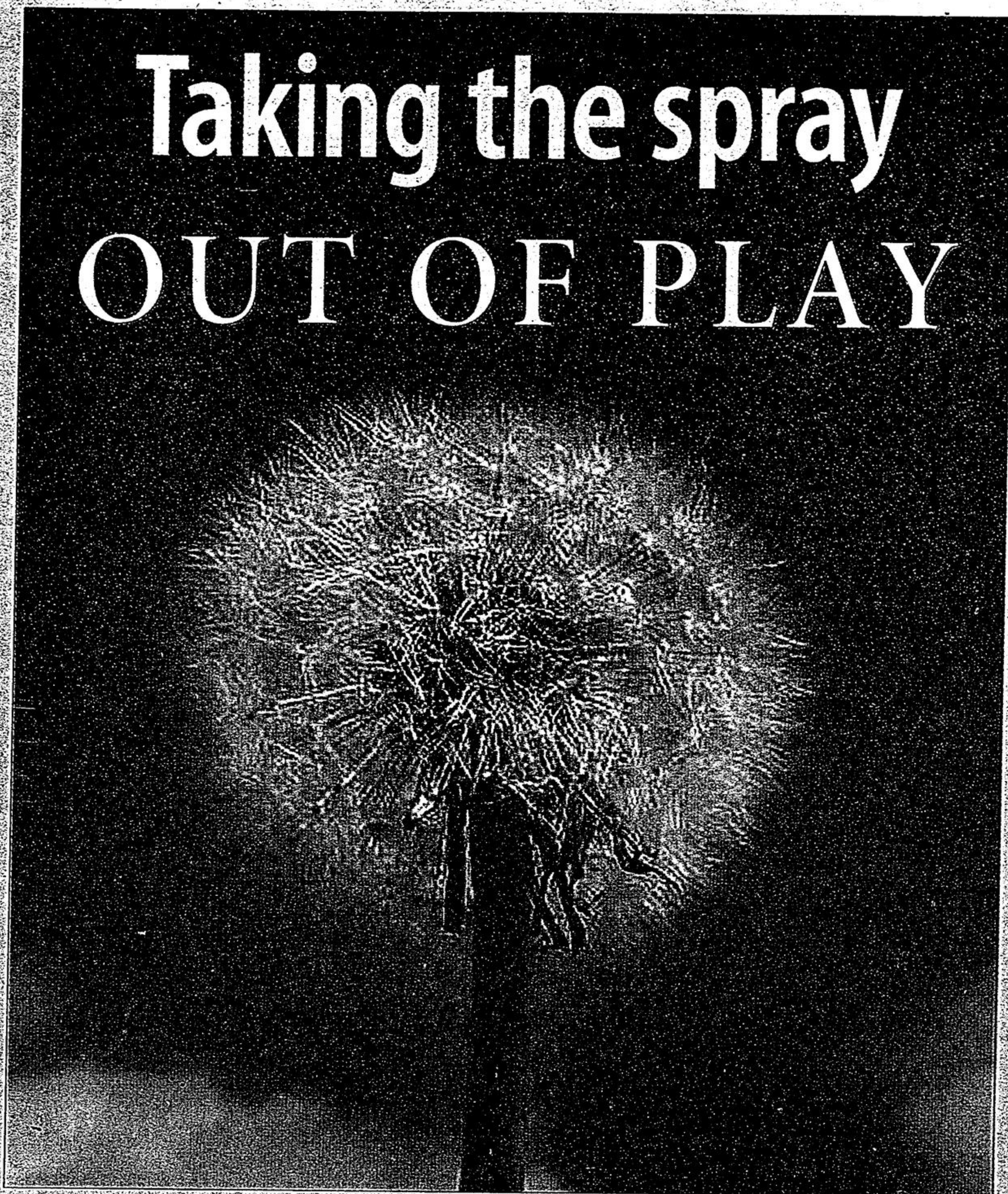
Vaughan, Georgina, King, Markham, Newmarket and Whitchurch-Stouffville didn't use any pesticides last year.

The Canadian Cancer Society has called for a ban on the use of pesticides for ornamental purposes, citing research done by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) that states "some substances used in pesticides are classified as known, probable or possible carcinogens."

Maintenance of sports fields is possible without using pesticides, Markham Councillor Erin Shapero said.

The danger from pesticides isn't only from direct physical contact. Pesticide runoff can end up in streams and rivers and pesticides are airborne, allowing them to be inhaled, she said.

Ms Shapero would like to see a townwide ban on pesticides similar to that in effect in Toronto where pesticides are only used to control noxious weeds such as poison oak.



## Tall grass, organic fertilizer makes difference

Keeping your lawn weed free the natural way is easier than you think.

Here are a few tips to keep your lawn lush and pesticide free:

- Mow high and leave grass clippings on the lawn. Set your lawnmower to the highest setting, allowing grass to grow longer. Tall, dense grass blocks the sun from getting to weeds and will help kill weed seedlings;

- Water infrequently, but water well. This forces the roots of the grass to grow deeper in search of water. As the soil at the surface becomes dry the weeds get choked and die. Wait until the grass starts to curl before watering. Watering on a schedule will only encourage weed growth.

When you do water, put out a

cup and allow it to fill up about three centimetres;

- Use a high quality organic fertilizer. Slow release organic fertilizers provide vital nutrients to grasses without risk of burning or harming the grasses. These natural products help support the health and vitality of the grass and soil, lengthening and strengthening grass roots, and helping the grass fight off pests and disease. Commercial fertilizers may harm grass and environmental health, leach soil nutrients and foster lawn diseases like brown spot and snow mold. Most lawns only require a spring and fall feeding, though stressed lawns can benefit from additional applications;

- Control bugs naturally. Many bugs can be killed using a dishwasher soap and water solution,

sprayed on plants. Consider installing a bird feeder since birds eat up those pesky bugs and;

- Add compost. About one part compost and two parts dirt is what you should be striving for. Better quality soil and more of it will promote grass growing deep roots that will choke out the weeds;

The Town of Richmond Hill is holding an organic lawn care workshop April 27 from 7 to 9 p.m. at Elgin West Community Centre.

The York Region Environmental Alliance and Toronto Region Conservation Authority is also holding organic lawn care workshops.

See schedule at [www.markham.ca/markham/channels/parks/lawn-care-prgms.htm](http://www.markham.ca/markham/channels/parks/lawn-care-prgms.htm)

## From weeds to salad

*One person's weed is another person's culinary delight. Here are some uses for the dandelions that will soon be popping up.*

### Grandma Di Iorio's Dandelion Salad

Use the leaves of the dandelion, but avoid the stem of the flower which has a bitter milk. Dandelion greens have a slight "bite" to them. They are best picked early in the spring because they are more tender. Mix the leaves with other leafy greens such as spinach, romaine lettuce or arugula. Also add:

olive oil

onion

sea salt

lemon

flax

cayenne pepper

a clove of garlic

### Dandelion Fritters

This recipe uses the flower of the dandelion, a great source of vitamin A.

1 cup whole-wheat flour

2 tablespoons of olive oil

2 teaspoons baking powder

1 cup dandelion flowers

1 pinch salt

1 egg

non-stick vegetable oil spray

1/2 cup low-fat milk or water

*In a bowl mix together flour, baking powder and salt. In a separate bowl, beat egg, then mix with milk or water and olive oil. Combine with dry mixture.*

*Stir in yellow flowers carefully, taking care not to crush them. Lightly spray a griddle or frying pan with vegetable oil. Heat until thoroughly warmed. Pour batter onto griddle by spoonfuls and cook like pancakes. Makes 10 fritters.*

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