

STAFF PHOTO/NICK IWANYSHYN

Dandelions flourish near the Byers Pond Way trails in Stouffville Thursday.

Weeds keep kids, runners out of municipal parks

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policy now that they have seen the results."

Stouffville Councillor Richard Bartley has received a handful of complaints from residents, the first since the province banned cosmetic pesticides three years ago.

"I'm disgusted basically with school properties, parks, boulevards," he said. "When the weeds take over the sod and boulevards, where are we going to get the money to replace it all?"

"People take pride in their properties and then they go and look at the boulevards."

Over to Dalton McGuinty.

"We have to wait for the province of Ontario to come up with some sort of organic solution," Mr. Bartley said. "They kind of hold all the strings on this one."

Councillor Susanne Hilton wants the town to increase its weekly grass-cutting schedule, especially during dandelion season.

"I agree with the residents who see dandelions and weeds as a nuisance to homeowners who try to keep their lawns weed free," she said. "They do not give an attractive presentation to the town."

Councillor Phil Bannon has had no complaints from residents.

"There's nothing we can actually do about it," he said. "Because of the dry weather conditions, the dandelions are flourishing and the grass isn't growing because of the lack of rain."

"The weeds are growing back the day after we cut the weeds."

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Allan Goldstein wouldn't put his child in the middle of a hornet's nest.

And he certainly won't let her play in the local park.

The Thornhill dad believes sending his allergy-prone daughter into Beverly Glen Park would be just about as dangerous, given the knee-high weeds taking over the neglected neighbourhood green space.

And he's mad as a hornet about it.

"I don't care if they have to use old-fashioned push mowers. We pay for these parks to be built. Either we can use them or not. And if we can't use them, then I want a reduction in my taxes."

The province's cosmetic pesticides ban came into effect on Earth Day, April 22, 2009, in an effort to reduce the potential toxic effects on families and pets. Since then, municipally

owned land has turned progressively yellow — bright dandelion yellow — and not everyone is pleased by the sight.

Mr. Goldstein took his dog Blue to the local park for a romp, but after a few steps in, he says he turned around and let the golden retriever sniff around the baseball diamond, instead.

"The problem is getting worse and worse. The dandelions are simply multiplying. This particular park was half as bad last year."

Marjie Fraser, Vaughan's director of parks and forestry operations, agrees turf grass weeds grew higher this year.

The warm spring and lack of snowmelt from a mild winter caused a shortage of water in the soil, she said. This caused weeds to thrive and the turf grass to struggle.

As well, several years of a pesticide-free environment created conditions that allow dandelions to successfully compete with grass, she said.

Jody Klapman also isn't happy with the result and she's noticed other neighbours similarly disgruntled, watching parents drag their children from the weed stalks while wondering out loud why the city isn't doing something about it.

As a runner who can no longer cut through the park, she sympathizes.

"You don't know what's underneath. You don't know what you're stepping in."

Thornhiller Gila Martow is miffed that golf courses and farms, which cover much of the land use in Ontario, are exempt from the cosmetic ban, leaving parks to resemble "weed farms with a few blades of grass".

While municipalities may not have budgets for safer weed-discouragers, such as corn gluten meal, there are more affordable tactics, said Fiona Wood with York Environmental Alliance.

Mowing more often when dandelions are blooming will prevent them from going to seed, she said. Allowing the grass to grow longer in the non-blooming season will shade the weed growth. When public property has bare patches, it should be overseeded right away and, rather than the less-hardy Kentucky bluegrass, she suggests perennial rye or fescue.

And when you find yourself irritated by dandelions, she suggests taking a lesson from children.

"You see them picking them to make chains and bouquets. They don't see them as weeds. They see them as pretty yellow flowers."

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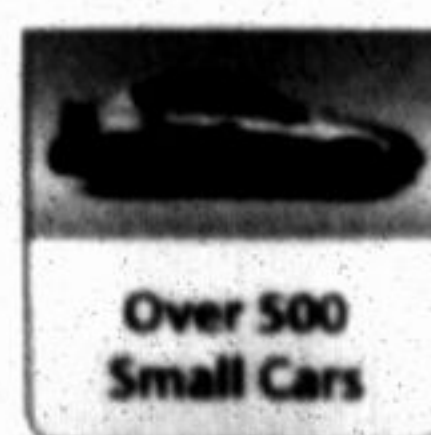


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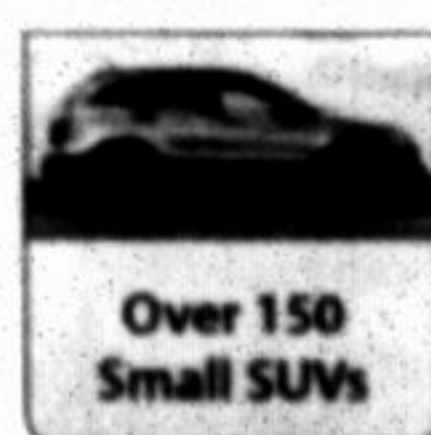
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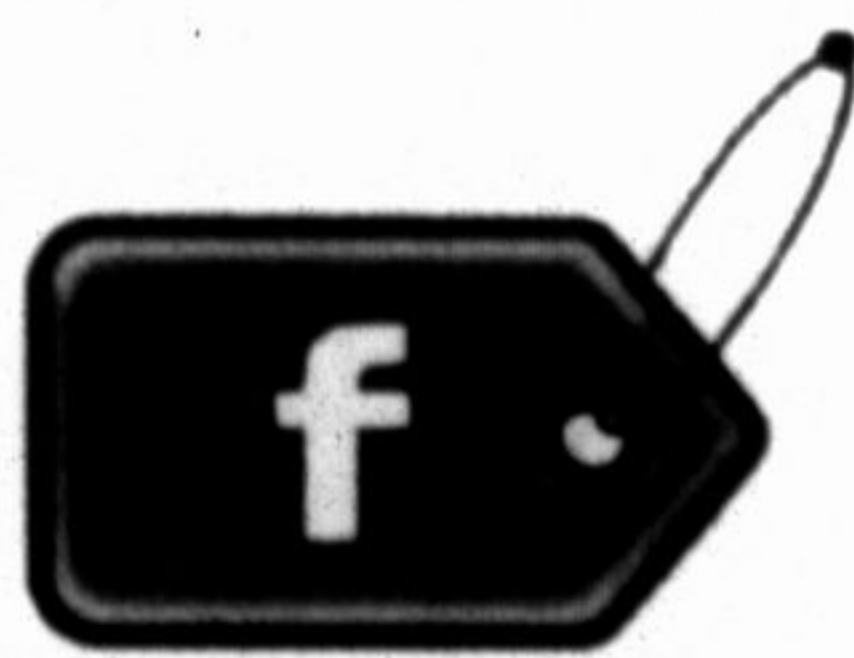


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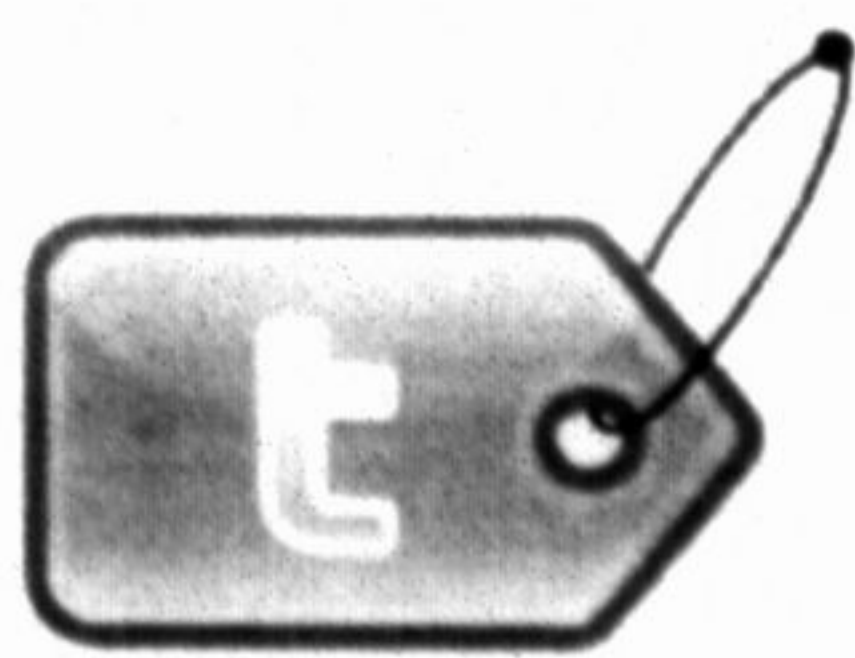


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