

Over the Back Fence  
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Approx 620 words

Herbicide-free zone  
By Alva Wood

The first thing that Hector Wentz did after he got elected to the village Council, two years ago, was to move that the village ban all herbicides.

“If the entire province of Ontario can do it,” he declared, “surely our little village can do it.”

There were a few protests, of course. Many residents were used to spraying Killex on their lawns twice a year, whether the lawns needed it or not, to keep dandelions under control. A pre-emptive strike, they called it.

“When you’re dealing with dandelions,” decreed Florence Armitage, “the best defence is offense.”

The mayor, Jake Bowers, favoured the ban. Until his wife Astrid reminded him that she had a flower business, and if she couldn’t control weeds with chemicals, he might have to spend a lot more time on his hands and knees.

Council moved an amendment: to ban herbicides for non-commercial uses.

Sam Burkholder told them they were putting farmers out of business. He needed Roundup to kill vegetation around the trunks of his fruit trees, to reduce transpiration losses.

“If I can’t use Roundup,” he said, “I’ll either have to use more irrigation water, or you can send staff over to till the ground around each tree by hand.”

They amended the amendment: non-farm and non-commercial uses.

There were some unexpected effects.

The environmental society promoted a nice little network of walking trails. Now the wild blackberries are moving in. Walking past those groping tendrils feels like fighting off a predatory octopus.

The village gravelled some of the trails. Now the grass is moving in.

“Why don’ we jus’ spray the dam’ trails wit’ Roundup,” asks Eugenie Chacon, the new engineer from Brazil on staff.

“Not allowed to,” says her boss, Freddie Fallis.

“Why not?” she demands.

“Because we are not a farm,” explains Freddie.

“For sure we not commercial,” Eugenie agrees.

Then last week Freddie went for a drive around his domain, to see how his roads were doing. He came back to the village offices in a panic.

“I need a bigger budget,” he tells administrator Henry Hill.

“Not a chance,” says Henry. “The annual budget’s already been set.”

“All those roads we paved last year,” laments Freddie, “we’re going to have to pave them all over again!”

Henry wants to know why.

“Because,” says Freddie, “there’s dandelions growing up through the asphalt! You should see it,” he says, choking back a sob. “It pushes chunks of asphalt out of the way as it pops up!”

“Plants are amazing that way,” agrees mayor Jake, who happens to be passing by. “Did you know that if you lie down on top of a bamboo shoot, it will pierce right through your body?”

Jake sometimes has trouble remembering that he’s not still a zoology professor.

“Chinese mandarins were reputed to use bamboo shoots as a form of torture,” Jake continues. “When they didn’t stake their victims on top of ant hills. What was I trying to say?”

Freddie looks blank.

“Dandelions,” explains Henry patiently. “Destroying our roads.”

“No herbicides,” rules Jake. “We must be seen to obey our own standards.”

“What can I do?” Freddie pleads.

“Dig them out,” suggests Jake.

“Then I’ll need asphalt to patch the holes,” says Freddie.

“Burn them,” suggests Henry. “Use a flame-thrower.”

“It’ll set the asphalt on fire,” replies Freddie. “Then I’ll need even more.”

Henry sighs. “We put you in charge,” he says. “You figure out a solution.”

Which is why the last issue of our local paper carried a Help Wanted ad from the village.

**“Part-time employee needed. Applicant must be self-assigning and responsible. Duties include monitoring recently paved streets on foot and pounding intrusive dandelions back into the ground. Applicant should provide own hammer.”**