Controlling Weeds Frequently Asked Questions

CONTROLLING WEEDS IN THE TOWN OF CAMBRIDGE

The Town of Cambridge implements an annual weed control program for parks and a twice yearly program for kerbs, footpaths, laneways and median islands.

FAQs ABOUT OUR WEED CONTROL PROGRAM

1. Why does the Town need to control weeds?

There are a range of reasons why it is important for the Town to have in place weed control measures. These include to:

- ensure the public can safely use an area (particularly with regard to Bindii weed infestations);
- prevent weeds from becoming trip hazards in paths and, lawns;
- ensure kerbing, paths, laneways and other infrastructure is not obscured by weeds;
- reduce fire loads in bushland;
- protect our infrastructure from damage that may occur with excessive weed growth (such as damage to bitumen roads and footpaths);
- support the survival of turf, trees and plants in parks and road reserves and improve biodiversity values in bushland; and
- maintain our parks and roads to an appropriate standard.

2. What methods of weed control are available?

There are a variety of ways to control weeds, including:

- slashing them with a whipper-snipper or manually pulling them out;
- ongoing turf management programs that include mowing, fertilising and watering;
- mulching the affected area;
- Planting out with ground covers/plants able to smother the ground;
- spraying with herbicides; and

3. What is the definition of a Herbicide?

Herbicides, commonly known as weed-killers, are designed and used to kill, control or inhibit growth of unwanted plants.

There are five types of herbicides:

- Broad spectrum (Non-Selective) that affect a wide variety of plants.
- Selective that affect a narrow range of plants meaning they can be applied amongst desirable plants without causing them any harm;
- Contact herbicides kill plant tissue at or near the point of contact and do not spread around the plant. To be effective contact herbicides need to be applied evenly over the targeted area..
- Systemic herbicides move through plant tissue via the plant's circulation system. This type of herbicide can be injected into the plant.
- Residual/Pre-emergent can be applied to the soil to kill weeds by root uptake. These herbicides remain active in the ground for a certain length of time, and can control germinating seedlings.

4. What herbicides does the Town use to control the different types of weeds?

The Town uses five different herbicides to control specific weed types. We use:

1. Glyphosate,a non-selective, broad-spectrum, systemic herbicide, to control annual weeds and grasses;
2. Jolt, a selective herbicide, to control a variety of weeds found in turf including Bindii (one-hunga), clover, capeweed, etc;
3. Fusilade, a selective, systemic, post-emergence herbicide to control annual and perennial weed grasses in garden beds and bushland;
4. Simazine, a pre-Emergent herbicide to prevent weed seeds from germinating to control Geraldton Carnation weed in bushland; and
5. Metsulfuron, a selective herbicide to control Soursob and Bridal Creeper weeds in bushland.

5. Who governs the use of herbicides for weed control in the Town of Cambridge?

The Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) controls and regulates pesticides, including herbicides. The APVMA assesses chemical products for toxicology, efficacy, environmental impact, residues, breakdown times and occupational health impacts**.**

The WA Health Department controls the Town's herbicide operations through the "Health (Pesticides) Regulations 2011" and Amendment Regulations 2016. The legislation permits the Town and all WA local government authorities to use herbicides in their weed control programs, in accordance with the product instructions and safety data sheets.

6. What weed control programs does the Town have in place?

The Town operates following weed control programs:

- Kerbs, footpaths, median islands - Glyphosate herbicide is applied twice per year around November and May with a specially fitted motor vehicle and / or tractor. This is not a blanket spray and only areas with visible weeds are sprayed by the operator;

- Park facilities, garden beds, trees, paths, poles, fences etc. - Glyphosate herbicide is applied on average three times per year by an operator walking to each of the areas requiring treatment. This program keeps grass weeds under control to protect plants in garden beds, trees in turf and stops grass/weeds from growing onto paths and park facilities. In garden beds the Town uses mulch to retain moisture and suppress weeds, reducing the need for chemicals.

- Sportsgrounds and park turf surfaces (grass) - Two programs are used to control annual weeds in turf areas:

    1. **Turf Management Program**
       The Town operates various turf management programs including mowing, scarifying, fertilising and irrigation. These programs provide quality turf surfaces and help in managing weeds which reduces the need for weed control. Because the turf is maintained to such a high standard weed seeds find it difficult to germinate.

       However, depending on environmental conditions from year to year, if the turf management programs do not appropriately control weeds and turf quality is affected, a herbicide will be used to achieve a level of weed control and ensure the park is safe to use.

    2. **Weeds in Turf Control Program (Jolt herbicide)**
       Jolt herbicide is applied once a year to a select number of parks to control weeds. Common weeds targeted include Bindii (very prickly to walk on), clover, capeweed, etc. To minimise the Town's use of herbicides, a percentage weed infestation guideline is used to assess parks for required weed control. That is, if weeds infest more than 30% of a park, that park is included on a weed control program. Parks are not blanket sprayed. Only areas of infestation are treated and this changes from year to year depending on environmental conditions.

- Laneways - Weeds in laneways are sprayed twice a year (around July and January) with a mox of glyphosate and Simazine.

- Natural Bushland - The Town employs a combination of herbicide and manual weed removal methods to control weeds in natural bush with the aim of allowing native plants to grow and the bushland retain healthy native vegetation. Using mechanical methods such as whipper snippers is not appropriate due to the damage they can cause to very small native plants.

A weed control schedule has been developed to target specific weeds that are present at certain times of the year including:

- Mulching - to retain moisture and suppress weeds;
- Glyphosate - to target any weed at any time of the year, and can be sprayed without damaging native plants;
- Fusilade - to control annual and perennial weed grasses growing amongst native plants in late winter; and
- Metsulfuron - to control Soursob and Bridal Creeper.

The above are not all used at the same time but individually selected to control specific weeds at certain times of the year.

7. Why does the Town use herbicides to control weeds?

Herbicides are used to supplement non-herbicide methods of weed removal as mechanical and/or hand removal methods alone are not sufficient to achieve an appropriate level of weed control. Herbicides supplement the non-herbicide methods as they have the ability to control the underground stems of weeds, not just the leaf, meaning weeds cannot re-grow. Follow-up applications are not necessary other than to control new weeds that have grown from seed blown into the area or have grown into the area from adjacent infested areas.

Weeds are a primary cause of bushland degradation and are often introduced by wind, domestic animals and walkers, or by the dumping of garden refuse, particularly on bushland fringes. If left uncontrolled weeds smother native vegetation and can penetrate further into bushland changing its appearance and greatly reducing its biodiversity value. Healthy native plants support local native animals so it is vital that any threats to bushland health are addressed. Weeds are also a fire hazard as they dry out and die.

When comparing all the methods available for controlling weeds along kerbing and footpaths the herbicide control method is considered to be the most effective, the safest for operators to apply, the quickest to complete, the least disruptive to park, road and path users and the most cost effective.

The Town cannot completely eradicate weeds but aims to control them. Herbicides are used as a last resort and only when mechanical methods cannot achieve the level of control required to meet our risk management responsibilities such as ensuring public open spaces and road verges are safe for public use.

8. How many Town parks are sprayed with herbicide to control weeds?

The Town has 477 hectares of parks including 200 hectares of turf. Herbicide weed control in turf changes from year to year and is dependent on the amount of weeds on each park. On average the Town treats around 50% (100 hectares) of our turf per year to control weeds in parks.

9. How many Town roads are sprayed with herbicide to control weeds?

The Town has approximately 190 kilometres of roads and paths within road reserves. Although all 190 kilometres of roads/paths are checked for weeds, only visible weeds are sprayed. On average 50% (95 kilometres) of roads/paths are sprayed with Glyphosate twice a year.

10. How many Town laneways are sprayed with herbicide to control weeds?

Approximately 22 kilometers of laneways are checked and sprayed as required, twice per year.

The problem weeds in lanes are typically Caltrop, Fleabane and tall grasses. Caltrop produces a lot of double-gee like seeds that can easily spread into private properties, parks and footpaths. Fleabane is a weed that has fluffy seeds, spreads quickly and takes over garden beds. Tall grasses become a fire hazard when they dry out in summer.

Brush cutting is expensive to carry out and can cause damage to fences. The contractor does not spray established garden beds in the lane unless they are covered in weeds or not being maintained.

11. Does the Town of Cambridge use non-herbicide methods to control weeds?

Yes, the Town using a range of non-herbicide methods:

Mechanical Whipper Snipper Method
This method requires the operator to cut individual weeds with whipper snippers or edging machines. This process is labour intensive and only controls the leaf part of the weed. The underground parts (stems/roots) remain alive and weeds re-sprout within a couple of weeks after being cut.

This method is used when areas have been infested with tall weeds and it is considered more efficient to use this method to quickly cut them down. This method is similar to mowing so it does not have any effect on underground weed stems and roots and will not achieve the same standard as chemical control. Using whipper snippers along paths and kerbs is not desirable as there is the possibility of flicking stones at pedestrians, vehicles and private property. This method requires extensive traffic management as operators need to be close to or on the road to cut the weeds.

Turf Management Program
The Town operates various turf management programs including mowing, scarifying, fertilising and irrigation. These programs produce turf surfaces to a quality standard where weed seeds find it difficult to germinate, which results in a reduction in the need to use herbicide control.

Mulch
The Town uses this method of weed control in garden beds, bushland areas and around trees in lawn. A layer of mulch of around 75-100mm thick is good for retaining soil moisture and is a very good weed suppressant, as weed seeds find it difficult to germinate.

Use of Smothering Plants
The Town, where possible, uses plants/groundcovers in garden beds that are able to provide a smothering effect on the ground below. This creates an unfavourable environment for weed seeds to germinate and if some do, in most cases you cannot see them.

12. Why do you need to apply Glyphosate around trees?

The application of Glyphosate around trees is an effective method of keeping weeds and turf away from the base of the tree. Keeping this area free from weeds and turf is important for the infiltration of water, nutrients and oxygen to the root system and helps to develop a healthy tree. In the past keeping the base clear was achieved with whipper snippers, however this method was not as effective as herbicide control and damage to the bark of trees was significant and unavoidable.

13. When applying herbicide around trees to control weeds, can the Glyphosate damage or kill the tree?

Damage to the tree is possible if the herbicide is not diluted and not applied according to the label instructions. When applied correctly trees will not be affected.

14. Is it safe to use a park, including dogs and animals, after it's been sprayed with a herbicide, including Glyphosate?

Herbicides, including Glyphosate, are registered by the WA Health Department for commercial and domestic use to be applied in accordance with the manufacturer's product use information and safety data sheets.
These products become inactive after application when the turf has dried. When spraying an area the Town erects signs advising spraying is taking place. The signs are removed when the area is dry, after which the public and animals can use the sprayed areas.

The WA Health Department has previously advised there is no solid evidence for the Department to prohibit the use of Glyphosate for weed control programs by local councils. It does however acknowledge that there may be some residents who could be sensitive to Glyphosate and encourages those residents to request that the kerb and footpath in front of their property be exempt from spraying with Glyphosate.

15. What do I do if my dog and I step on wet turf that has just been sprayed with herbicide because I didn't see the signs?

Although the herbicide is diluted to the required concentration before being applied to the turf, it is recommended that you wash any parts of your or your dog's body that has come in contact with the wet turf.

16. What controls are in place to manage herbicide application programs and ensure they're applied correctly?

The Town's herbicide applications are controlled by the WA Health Department "Health (Pesticides) Regulations 2011" and Amendment Regulations 2016 including:

- All operators are trained and licensed in accordance with the Regulations; and
- Only herbicides registered by the WA Health Department are used in accordance with the products safety data sheets.

The following principles underpin the Towns herbicide use:

- Minimise pesticide use, consistent with achieving acceptable herbicide control outcomes;

- Use herbicides on the basis of risk management, good contract management and auditing of results;
- Consult the community and provide timely notification of herbicide application events;
- Consult other government agencies and local stakeholders when herbicide control activities have the potential to impact on environmentally significant land, water catchment areas, farming property or other sensitive area or activity; and
- Comply with all applicable legislation, codes and policies with respect to herbicide application by the Town or our contractors.

In addition, the Town has the following controls in place:

- Before each herbicide application event, the proposed spraying program of spray locations and chemical concentration is agreed;
- Spraying ceases if wind speeds consistently exceed 15km/hr;
- Herbicide is not applied to the sand soft-fall area of playgrounds;
- Herbicide is applied outside the playground and on rubber soft-fall surfaces but only when there are no children in the playground; and
- Glyphosate Biactive is a specifically formulated Glyphosate used by the Town as it contains an aquatic surfactant that allows for use in environmentally sensitive areas such as adjacent to lakes.

17. What information is provided to the public/residents regarding herbicide use in the Town?

The Town informs the public about upcoming programs using a range of communication tools:

- Advertisements in the local Cambridge Post newspaper ;
- A public notice on the Town's website; and
- Information signs placed on-site during herbicide application works from the commencement of spraying until the herbicide has dried.

18. Can I be exempted from having the council verge kerbing and footpath outside my property treated with herbicide?

Yes - Residents can request the Town not to apply the herbicide Glyphosate that it normally uses twice a year (November and May) to control weeds adjacent to their property. In requesting an exemption the resident agrees to control weeds to the same standard that can be achieved by the herbicide control method.

19. Can I be exempted from having the council park/land side of my fence-line treated with herbicide?

Yes - Residents can request the Town not to apply the herbicide Glyphosate that it normally uses two to three times a year to control weeds on the park side of their property fence-line. In requesting an exemption the resident agrees to control weeds to the same standard that can be achieved by the herbicide control method and clearly display the property address number at the side and/or rear boundary fence surrounding the property to ensure the spraying operator can identify the exempted property.

20. Can I be exempted from having the immediate council park turf area adjacent to my house treated with herbicide to control weeds?

Residents can request the Town not to apply herbicide within a maximum of 5 metres from the rear or side of a private property. In requesting an exemption the resident agrees to clearly display the property address number at the side and/or rear boundary fence surrounding the property to ensure the spraying operator can identify the exempted property.

The Town's current annual weed control program in parks and biannual weed control program in kerbs, footpaths, laneways and median islands are listed below:

Program Name & Herbicide	**Location**	**Date of Application**
General weed control in kerbs, paths, laneways and median islands *Glyphosate*	Throughout Town roads	Oct and May
Control of weed grasses in bushland *Fusilade*	Various bushland areas and garden beds	Various
Control of weeds in turf *Jolt*	Various parks	Aug/Sept
Control of weeds and grasses *Glyphosate*	Various bushland areas and garden beds	Various
Control of weeds and grasses *Glyphosate and Simazine*	Throughout Town laneways	July and January
Control of various bulbous weeds *Metsulfuron*	Various bushland areas	July to October