



IDENTIFY:

REDUCE USE OF HERBICIDES

Insecticides can harm pollinators directly, killing them outright or affecting their behaviour and ability to complete their life cycle. Fungicides and herbicides harm pollinators indirectly: herbicides can greatly reduce the wildflowers pollinators depend on for food, while fungicides can increase the toxicity of some insecticides.

Any herbicide usage in your club should adhere to the relevant policies in place in Ireland. Taking small steps to reduce the use of herbicides can help pollinators.

Consider strimming instead of spraying around fencing, goals and lights. Do not spray the base of trees or hedgerows.

- Consider mowing or strimming as an alternative to using pesticides.
- Avoid spraying non-mowed areas where wild flowers are growing or could grow.
- Where weed control is necessary, pull or use selective spot treatment where possible.
- Avoid spraying pollinator nesting sites such as soil banks or stone walls.

Where sports clubs are near rivers or streams, it is worth reconsidering pesticide use.

- A single drop of pesticide can breach the drinking water limit in a small stream for 30km.
- Avoid spraying chemicals close to drains and watercourses.





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Always follow pesticide instructions and follow the pollinator-friendly pesticide code:

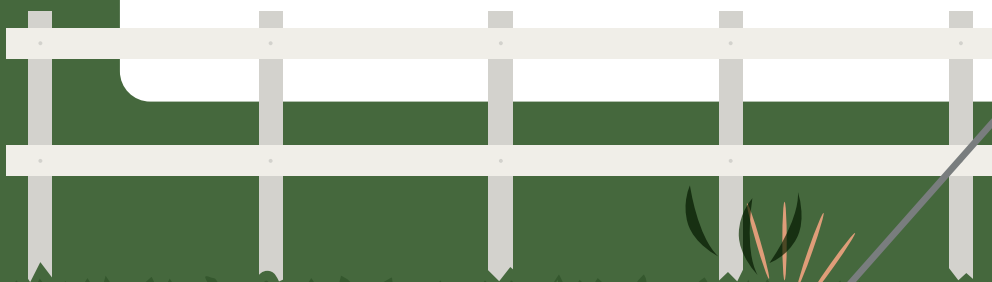


DO:

- ✓ Check the label and select pesticides that are less harmful to pollinators.
- ✓ Always read, understand, and follow the product label instructions fully.
- ✓ Treat only the target area .
- ✓ Spot-treat rather than use blanket sprays.
- ✓ Follow the buffer zone instructions on the product label.
- ✓ Leave areas of pollinator-friendly habitat free from all pesticides. These include areas of clover or wildflowers, the base of hedgerows, and any natural areas.
- ✓ Store and dispose of pesticides and their containers properly
- ✓ Minimize spray drift to non-target areas by:
 - Using equipment that reduces drift.
 - Checking the weather forecast before application and being mindful of changing conditions.
 - Ensuring you spray when the wind is blowing away from pollinator-friendly habitat.

DON'T:

- ✗ Do not apply pesticides to bees or other pollinating insects.
- ✗ Do not spray flower-rich areas (including weeds) when flowers are in bloom and providing food for bees. Plants we might consider weeds (e.g., Dandelions, Vetches, Clovers, Dead-Nettles, Knapweed) are important food sources, as they provide high quality pollen and nectar for bees.
- ✗ Do not apply pesticides to areas that have been identified as important nesting areas for pollinators.
- ✗ Do not apply pesticides to standing water.
- ✗ Do not spray if rain or strong wind is forecast in the next 48 hours.
- ✗ Do not fill a sprayer directly from a water course or carry out mixing, loading or other handling operations beside a water course.





ELIMINATING HERBICIDE USE FROM NON-PLAYING AREAS

A Green Club case study from Mullingar Shamrocks

In 2022, Westmeath Green Club Mullingar Shamrocks decided to eliminate the use of herbicide in club grounds. Shamrocks Green Club coordinator Joan Crawford shares the club's experience.

Why did Mullingar Shamrocks decide to go herbicide-free?

We're very conscious in the club of the impact that we have on the local environment. The club is located right beside the River Brosna and we wanted to reduce the risk of any our activities or products used in the club harming the river's water quality or biodiversity. Eliminating herbicide use is also consistent with our commitments as a GAA Healthy Club.

What did going herbicide-free involve?

We have traditionally used glyphosate-based herbicides to manage unwanted growth in our non-playing areas – mainly on the grass verges around the pitch, on our 1km walkaway and in the car park. We decided to use a vinegar-based alternative, inspired by an award-winning project by another Westmeath group – St Joseph's Foróige in Streamstown. This herbicide alternative is a mixture of white vinegar, salt and liquid soap/washing up liquid (1/2 cup of salt and 1 teaspoon of liquid soap/washing-up liquid to 1 litre of vinegar – the washing up liquid helps the vinegar stick to the leaves of the weeds).

This solution has to be used every 10-14 days initially to kill off the unwanted growth and then usage can be spaced out in a longer-term maintenance regime. It works best when accompanied with physical maintenance of the areas – e.g., hoeing and strimming – and so is more time-consuming and labour-intensive than using the more harmful herbicides is.

What were the benefits of going herbicide-free?

It is very important to the club to protect the River Brosna and to ensure that we are not harming the water or life in the river with our actions in the club. We were excited to try the herbicide-free solution in our grounds and we are very happy with the results and satisfied that we can now maintain our walkway, car-park and grass verges without damaging our local river and its rich ecosystem. The community workers who do the hard work of maintaining the grounds were also very pleased to be working with a natural, chemical-free product.





What were the challenges?

Going herbicide-free is more time and labour intensive than using harmful herbicide. Spraying initially needs to be done every couple of weeks and at regular intervals after that. Results are best if accompanied by hoeing and strimming of the areas. Glyphosate-based herbicides need only be sprayed a couple of times per year so the need for more frequently spraying of the vinegar solution means that there is an extra cost involved with the herbicide-free approach.

How did you fund the project?

We received funding through the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPro) Community Water Development Fund to cover the costs of the herbicide-free solution throughout our trial period.

How would you summarise your club's experience going herbicide-free?

There are certainly challenges in going herbicide-free that clubs should be aware of – it is more time and labour-intensive than using harmful herbicides and there is a cost involved for the club in purchasing the vinegar and salt supplies each year. However, we are sticking with the herbicide-free approach in Mullingar Shamrock. The solution works and the benefits for our natural environment are more than worth the effort.

