

## POLITICS AS USUAL: Green, Green Grass...

The Green, Green Grass of Home?

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

I was away last week celebrating our 10 year wedding anniversary and very much enjoying the sunny, very hot weather in Cuba. Funny story: standing in line at the beach BBQ in Varadero, I met a few people from Newmarket, and when they found out I was from Aurora, they asked if I knew about the Tattoo!

Who says advertising doesn't pay, eh?

Now, home in Aurora, we are enjoying much the same. Sunday we had absolutely perfect weather for the Aurora 150 Tattoo.

I hope you all got a chance to enjoy the many activities the Town and the Sesquicentennial Committee had in place this weekend at Machell Park. I have to say that I thought the Tattoo was spectacular. Fantastic job by David Veitch, Norm MacKenzie and, of course, the ever talented Shelley Ware. It will be a day Aurorans remember for a long time!

With the sunshine and the warm weather, the former environmental sciences student in me starts to think about lawns and watering and sustainable ecosystems within and around our community.

Most of us love our lawns and gardens and spend an inordinate amount of time making them look green and lovely. Indeed, if the garden section of Rona and Lowe's this weekend is any indication, I'd say the entire population of Aurora was in their gardens, pulling weeds and getting planting beds ready. (And a special thank you to my father-in-law for doing the spring cleaning in our back yard while we were away. What a great treat to return home to!)

However, as we all get our gardens geared up for the summer season, it may not be popular to say this, but I think our passion for perfectly green lawns is a wee bit misplaced.

Our climate is not readily conducive to growing and maintaining green, grass covered lawns. It takes a great deal of energy inputs to keep our lawns looking 'healthy' - energy in the form of 'food' or fertilizers, and pesticides (when or where allowed) and of course - lots and lots of water.

Before I get flaming emails or a nasty blog posting or two, I am not advocating the wholesale removal of grass lawns - just a more considered, perhaps judicious use of resources in their creation and maintenance.

In particular, I would like to advocate a strong conservation approach to watering in the garden. Yes, it is true, that the greatest use of water is household (your washrooms, dishwashers, washing machines etc). However, outdoor water use is considerable from May through September - spiking in the summer and at a time when its use for community uses - such as fire protection - can prove vital. So the minimization of the spike in usage is important to the greater safety of our community.

There are a number of simple techniques which we can all use to lessen our use of water - especially during the very dry summer months - those times of the year when Aurora is usually under at least a phase I water ban and often, unfortunately, a phase II; simple things, like the use of a rain barrel for example. Windfall Ecology Centre sells the barrels for \$50 every year and it's a great investment to make. We have one, as do many of our neighbours. The rain water can be used to water plants and planters. I haven't figured out a way to use it to water the lawn but it certainly is great for watering smaller areas.

Another technique is to water in the early morning (between 6 and 10 am in Aurora; odd days for odd numbered houses; even days for even numbered houses in accordance with our water use bylaw).

Watering your lawn at noon is entirely pointless and wasteful as the water will almost assuredly evaporate and do little, if anything,

for your grass.

Keep an eye on the weather as well. How many times have you seen someone's automatic sprinklers go on ? and stay on ? in the midst of a downpour? Given how much we pay for our water and how much we need it, watering your lawn in a rainstorm is just plain ridiculous. Just turn off your system.

The Region of York has a really good and informative site called ?Water for Tomorrow? ([www.waterfortomorrow.ca](http://www.waterfortomorrow.ca)). There are lots of really great ideas for an environmentally friendly and water conservation conscious lawn and garden. I have to put in a plug here for their suggestion of alternatives for grass lawns. Lots and lots of ideas for the use of native species and plants that don't require much, if any, watering.

I will say that I am an advocate for xeriscaping ? the use of drought tolerant plantings ? in partial place of lawns. I think it's a great idea. However, not everyone likes the idea of even a partially grass free lawn.

Case in point, I have yet to win over my husband to replacing part of our lawn with sedges, clover and other types of ground cover. Even pointing out it doesn't need to be mowed didn't sway him! Maybe this year?

Water for Tomorrow has a number of seminars and workshops throughout the next few months on watering techniques, how to plant a water conscious garden and other ideas. Check out the Town and the Region's sites for more information on what you can do in your garden to conserve water while still having a fabulous lawn and garden.

That's it for this week. Until next week, stay informed, stay involved because this is, after all, Our Town.