

Rochester Park and Forestry Pesticide-Free Parks Program

Pesticides and Rochester's Parks

City of Rochester Parks and Forestry Division members care for well over 4,200 acres of developed parks, flood control areas, right of way landscape areas, right of way mowing areas and natural areas. Over the past 5 years, staff has made concerted efforts to reduce the use of herbicides through an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program. This program considers the challenges of competing interests and sets thresholds for weeds in different areas.

While pesticide use has been greatly reduced, pesticides are used when necessary to manage noxious and invasive weeds as well as pest infestations near higher use areas. Their use in these instances reduces stinging insects such as wasps in high use areas, removes invasive non-native weeds so diverse native habitat can establish and thrive, preserves certain trees through the elimination of invasive pests, and maintains the clean appearance of parks and landscaped areas. With over 130 acres of parks to maintain for each park operations staff person, pesticides are used at times as a cost-effective method to help maintain the City's parks and open space lands.

Pesticide-free maintenance

To help reduce pesticide use staff have utilized various techniques such as hand weeding, and mulching while also using mechanical methods like mowing, propane weed burning. We have also tried environmental methods like goat grazing, over seeding/aeration, and selective vegetation. Because techniques like weeding and mulching are more labor intensive and expensive we do utilize youth crews, jail crews, and volunteers often participate to help with large weed removal activities.

Maintenance staff applies chemicals in consideration of the desired outcome, the method utilized and sound reasoning. We review the needs of the parks, the environmental impacts, the safety needed, staff efficiencies, budgets, and the desires for park aesthetics in our decisions. As such, many of Rochester's parks are virtually pesticide free from year-to-year not only because they are less complex to maintain but because we deliberately choose to limit the wholesale use of chemicals. However, whenever Park and Forestry staff does determine to use pesticides in accordance with the Integrated Pest Management program and the manufactures specifications, the application is performed under the direction of state-licensed applicators and for the limited amount needed.

Pesticide-free parks

The Rochester Parks and Forestry Division in 2016 has created a pilot program and has identified six (6) pesticide-free neighborhood parks located throughout the City's park system. In 2017 the pesticide-free parks were reviewed and expanded the listing to 12 parks.

Ward 1

Friendship
Southpoint (existing)

Ward 2

Dianah Olin Bird Sanctuary
Diamond Ridge – NW (Existing)

Ward 3

Badger Hills
Harvestview (existing)

Ward 4

Parkside
Joyce (existing)

Ward 5

Northern Slopes
Northern Heights Park-west of Northern Heights Drive (Existing)

Ward 6

Crescent Park
Viking (existing)

What is a pesticide-free park?

A pesticide-free park is one that is maintained without the use of registered pesticides. No registered pesticides will be used in a Rochester pesticide-free park during the calendar year of the pesticide free designation unless there is a threat to public health or safety. If it becomes necessary to apply pesticides at a pesticide-free park, the site will be clearly posted before, during and after the application to notify users of the situation.

How does a park or natural area become designated as a pesticide-free?

Staff has initiated a pilot program in 2016 for the initial 6 identified neighborhood parks to be pesticide free. Based on limited chemical use Staff expanded this list to 12 parks. Staff and any supportive volunteers that wish to help will maintain these parks in a pesticide free manner and will monitor the ongoing success of the pilot program.

Neighborhood Associations or other designated volunteer organizations may also desire other specific parks to become pesticide free. This designation for other specific parks must be requested and must be accompanied with a commitment for volunteer service to aid in the pest/weed control. As part of the request the organization must identify what contribution will be made each year to the monitoring and control of weeds or other pests. Approval of the designation may require the execution of an agreement for service. Any executed agreement will be reviewed annually and may be renewed by mutual agreement of the City and the volunteer organization.

Common work anticipated for volunteers in pesticide free parks would include:

- Mechanical trimming of grass around trees or placement of mulch rings around park trees.
- Pulling of weeds with in playground areas
- Pulling or trimming of weeds along fence lines and other obstructions
- Pulling or cutting of invasive/noxious vegetation.