



It's time to ban gas-powered leaf blowers!

Description

Citizens in Westmount, NDG and other jurisdictions have the power to end the use of leaf blowers, especially in the 2021 municipal elections

By Irwin Rapoport

As environmental awareness continues to grow, including the need to plant more trees, a burgeoning number of people are demanding that **gas and electric-powered leaf blowers be banned** and for municipalities and home and property owners to retain leaf cover on lawns over the winter until mid-spring, to provide a home to a vast array of wildlife and where countless species of insects lay their eggs.

“In the three decades since backpack blowers from Echo, Stihl and other companies became popular, **at least 100 U.S. cities have banned or restricted their use**,” states an article by **James Fallows** in the April 2019 edition of [*The Atlantic*](#),

“Most of those cities are in California because California is the only state whose jurisdictions have the authority to set their own air-pollution standards. With air-quality standards that were more aggressive than those in other states, California received special treatment under the Clean Air Act when it was passed in 1970. In the rest of the country, the law gives standard-setting authority to the federal government, which in practice means the Environmental Protection Agency.”

Since then, more municipalities have enacted such bans.

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– James Fallows, April 2019 edition, [*The Atlantic*](#)

The City of Westmount permits the use of leaf blowers for [two specific periods](#) – **April 1 to May 1** and **October 1 to December 1**



, between 8 am and 4 pm, from Monday to Saturday.

A February 22, 2018 article in [The Gazette](#), pointed out how concerns about gas-powered leaf blowers were raised by residents in the 2017 municipal election,

“When Westmount Mayor Christina Smith was campaigning in last fall’s municipal election, one of the most common issues residents raised was the **noise and pollution from leaf blowers**, the kind that landscapers wear on their backs to blast away leaves, grass and dirt. But now some say Smith’s plan to ban gas-powered leaf blowers as early as this spring, and gas-powered lawnmowers next spring, is too much, too soon. Landscaping companies say they will have to scramble to buy expensive new electric equipment if the new rules are adopted in council next month to be implemented this spring.”



Leaf blower in action – Image: Photo By [Marco Verch](#) via [StockPholio.net](#)

As pointed out, Westmount has not banned these devices. A *Westmount Independent* article from March 6, 2018, [Gas leaf blowers get reprieve](#), stated,

“The city’s ban on gas-powered leaf blowers proposed for April 1 has been delayed for now, but the permitted hours of use will be shortened to between 8 am and 4 pm from 7 am to 6 pm.

Mayor Christina Smith announced the changes February 28 after meeting with landscape contractors and receiving many calls from residents facing significant monthly charges if their gardeners had to suddenly invest in electric equipment.

‘I realize the industry was not ready for the timeline, but it could come for October,’ she said. Now, however, the contractors have been made aware of the plans and have been told that the city will be looking at ‘heavy



enforcement' of the regulations.

A ban on the use of gas mowers for properties of 20,000 square feet or less will also be delayed, she said.

Both were announced at the council meeting February 5.”

There are many pressing issues to be discussed in the upcoming Westmount municipal election, including roads and infrastructures, spending and taxes, and the city’s relationship with Montreal. Westmount residents pushed the issue of banning leaf blowers in 2017 – will they do the same in 2021?

A call for the ban on leaf blowers and the promotion of leaving leaves on the ground is the cri de coeur of the newly-formed [Coalition for green and quiet neighbourhoods \(CoalitionQuiet\)](#) in neighbouring NDG. The group describes itself as a “citizens group that is working to educate the public about the benefits of leaves and to end the use of gas leaf blowers in the borough of Côte-des-Neiges – Notre-Dame-de-Grâce and beyond.”

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In its Spring 2021 newsletter, it discussed its petition for a ban, “Our [petition](#) to the CDN-NDG Borough Council has more than 650 signatures! We notice that there are more and more boroughs and cities with leaf-blower petitions, like [this one in Toronto](#), with thousands of signatures.”

This approach to garner support for such bans can easily be emulated across Quebec, where municipalities are holding elections in November. This certainly gives environmental activists a springboard to further their agenda and get the public on their side. Should a similar petition be organized by Westmount and should it secure a majority of Westmount citizens, it could force the newly-elected administration to act rapidly.

In early spring, CoalitionQuiet distributed 1000 flyers to households in NDG, via volunteers, due to a donation from [Réseau Demain le Québec](#) (of the [David Suzuki Foundation](#)). States the group’s newsletter: “We invite you to print some flyers and share them with your neighbours!” Here is a [link](#) for the flyer, which can easily be adapted by other groups seeking a ban.

CoalitionQuiet is asking questions at monthly CDN-NDG Borough council meetings, which citizens in other municipalities can also emulate. Here is a [link](#) for a letter that the group is asking residents to send to their councillors that can easily be adapted for use in other jurisdictions. The letter contains some powerful arguments that are solidly sourced.



Photo By [Nan Palmero](#) via [StockPholio.net](#)

The group's newsletter also noted that "**Elizabeth Robinson** is leading the campaign in the borough of Ville Marie, which is especially interesting because it is the only borough in Montreal so far to have a bylaw banning gas-powered leaf blowers at all times. The problem is that the by-law is not published online and, therefore, very few people know that it exists. Elizabeth is in communication with her councillor, **Cathy Wong**, to explore how to make our citizens more aware of this by-law, and how to better enforce it (complaint + inspection + fine?). Boroughs that want green and quiet neighbourhoods must set an example with their own practices."

Here is a [link](#) to a **three-part webinar** concerning the negative impacts of using leaf blowers and the benefits of having a leaf cover for lawns.

To contact **CoalitionQuiet**, visit facebook.com/Coalition-pour-quartiers-verts-paisibles-Green-Quiet-Neighborhoods

This November 17, 2020, article from Washington University in [St. Louis, Electric or Gas Leaf Blowers... Neither?](#) presents a compelling case to ban leaf blowers.

States the article,

"Gas-powered leaf blowers and lawnmowers are more detrimental than one would think. Many consumer-grade blowers (and some mowers) use a two-stroke engine, which lacks an independent lubrication system, so fuel has to be mixed with oil. Burning oil and fuel emits a number of harmful toxic pollutants into the air,



including carbon monoxide, nitrous oxides (which cause smog formation and acid rain), and hydrocarbons (a carcinogenic gas that also causes smog).”

“Surprisingly, **the number of air pollutants emitted by gas-powered leaf blowers and lawnmowers exceeds the pollutant emissions of large automobiles**, which are regulated to [reduce and capture](#) many air pollutants. A [2011 study](#) showed that **a leaf blower emits nearly 300 times the amount of air pollutants as a pickup truck**. Similarly, a [2001 study](#) showed that **one hour using a gas-powered lawnmower is equivalent to driving a car 100 miles**. Gas-powered leaf blowers and lawnmowers have the potential to cause serious environmental damage, so finding alternatives and utilizing best practices is key (Source: [Washington Post](#)).”

“In addition to air pollution, ozone is created when heat and sunlight react with nitrogen oxides and Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) that are emitted from combustion engines, including lawn equipment. [St. Louis is among the top-ranked areas for ozone and particle pollution](#). In fact, according to the [Clean Air Partnership](#), summertime ozone levels have exceeded federal-based health standards every year since the passage of the Clean Air Act. Therefore, small actions like seeking alternatives to the standard use of lawn equipment can go a long way in improving regional air quality and human health.”

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A section entitled, ***Leaves aren't litter!***, puts forward the basics,

“According to the [Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation](#), ‘one of the most valuable things you can do to support pollinators and other invertebrates is to provide them with the winter cover they need.’ Leaving the leaves, either by mowing them into a thin layer of mulch on your lawn or leaving them whole on landscaped areas, is actually the best alternative for everyone!”

Of course, this will require a shift in mindset, but it's not out of reach. Here are some things to consider:

- A thin layer of mowed/mulched leaves is beneficial for grass, as it cycles nutrients back into the soil. However, too much will damage or kill your grass – find the right balance!
- Leaves are a great addition to compost. Bag or pile extra leaves near your compost pile, and add a handful or two every time you empty your food scraps. This helps the composting process, protects insects hibernating in the leaf litter, and also deters scavenger animals. Note that it is better to leave leaves whole (rather than mulch them) to protect overwintering insects.
- Many of the insects we love and attract with native plants (like pollinators!) require safe habitat over the winter. The majority of butterflies and moths overwinter in the landscape (including leaf litter) as an egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, or adult. Some tuck themselves into a pile of leaves for protection. Others lay eggs in fallen leaves, which are also food when the eggs hatch. Some (like Luna moths and swallowtails) disguise cocoons and chrysalis as dried leaves, blending in with surrounding leaves. Bumblebees burrow under the ground and need leaves for extra protection from the cold. Other leaf-dependent animals – spiders, worms, beetles, millipedes and more – are necessary food sources for chipmunks, birds, and amphibians.
- Leaves are free mulch, protecting perennial plants, especially those that sprout early. Consider piling leaves



on empty vegetable beds or perennial beds or around the bases of trees to protect from cold and keep in moisture. They also keep weed seeds from sprouting.

- However, thick leaves on the sidewalk can be a hazard. Kindly relocate these to another landscape to avoid creating a slippery surface as they decompose.



post any remaining leaves as needed.

The decline in the number of insects has been in the news for

the past year and, should it continue, it will not only impact birds, bats, and other wildlife and forests, etc. but humanity itself. Insects are beneficial in so many ways. In fact, the disappearance of several native pollinators in Hawaii has required that Interior Department personnel now pollinate native plants by hand due to the loss of their insect partners.

And, yes, this is not only about protecting beautiful butterflies such as the Monarch, which migrates from Mexico to southern Canada, including Montreal, and back to the forests of Mexico, but species of insects that are considered to be ugly and “pests.” Protecting the web of life is the concern of all people on Earth, and should we fail to do so, we are all imperilled.

We all have an interest in protecting the environment for our children and future generations, be they people or flora and fauna. This will require a simultaneous mix of major societal changes via government, industry, commerce, and the combined actions of billions of individuals. Effectively dealing with gas-powered leaf blowers is doable and as we are seeing in CDN-NDG, concerned citizens can make a difference and have provided a blueprint on how to get started.

The time to act is now. Should we fail, we know what will happen.

Disclaimer: *The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of WestmountMag.ca or its publishers.*

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