

Use of herbicides in Churchyards

The most common weedkillers for use in non-agricultural and ornamental areas are based on the chemical glyphosate, the active ingredient of which is phosphonic acid.

These come in two forms:



1. Non-Residual Contact Herbicides

(Brand names Round-up, Stetson, Stirrup and others)

This form should be used in the neighbourhood of trees and shrubs. It is designed specifically to kill the weed without contaminating the soil, and quickly degrades. However, great care should be taken not to touch the bark or foliage of desirable plants. This can be done by using shields while spraying or by wiping on the weedkiller to individual weeds rather than spraying. This will depend on the type of weeds you need to destroy.

2. Residual Herbicides

(Brand names Mascot, Rival)

The active ingredient penetrates the soil and should not be used near the roots of desirable trees or shrubs as it can damage or kill them. It is useful around buildings since it discourages future growth, but should not be used on a slope where rain can wash it down to contaminate desirable plants below.

Both of these types of herbicide are irritants to eyes and skin and should be used with great care; especially avoid inhaling spray. Protective clothing and masks may be needed. It is important to read carefully and follow exactly all the instructions on the label.

Use of such products is subject to the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH).

"Consideration must be given as to whether it is necessary to use a pesticide at all in a given situation and, if so, the product posing the least risk to humans, animals and the environment must be selected. Adequate records of all operations involving pesticide application must be made and retained for at least three years."

There are restrictions on the use of herbicides in public places. An individual may buy and use them in his own garden but only a certified operator may use them in a public place. Whether Churchyards are deemed to be public places in law is not certain, but better to err on the safe side! Most agricultural colleges run regular two-day courses for the Certificate of Competence, these are available at Newton Rigg: (One-day Foundation Course; One-day Knapsack Spraying Course) which can eventually lead to National Test of Competence. It could make sense for a parish or group of parishes to have one of their Churchwardens, or an interested volunteer, to take such a course. Instructions on labels are seen as an absolute minimum in terms of personal and environmental protection, but the extra knowledge or competence gained on a training course could be a valuable investment.