



Pesticides - What You Need to Know

- Many commercial pesticides are associated with some risk to human health and the environment. It is illegal to claim that any pesticide is “safe”, even when used as directed.
- Scientific studies link exposure to certain lawn care pesticides with an increased risk of asthma, several types of cancer, nervous and immune system damage, liver or kidney damage, reproductive impairment, birth defects and disruption of the endocrine system.
- Lawn care pesticides present special risks for children who spend much of their time playing outdoors. A National Cancer Institute report states that children are at risk for brain and other childhood cancers and six times more likely to develop leukemia when lawn pesticides are used.
- Regular pesticide use kills microorganisms in the soil and weakens plants so that they are vulnerable to pest infestation and disease. Pesticides can also sicken or kill non-target species, such as beneficial insects, fish, birds, and even family pets.
- Many lawn care pesticides remain toxic long after the “24 hour” re-entry recommendation. Breakdown products (metabolites) of pesticides may be even more toxic than the original active ingredients. Inerts (undisclosed ingredients or “trade secrets”) can also be highly toxic and can comprise up to 99% of the pesticide product.
- Pesticide runoff pollutes ground and surface water which threatens the safety of our drinking water supply. In addition, many lawn pesticides are toxic to aquatic and marine organisms.

Safe and effective alternatives to pesticides are widely available at lawn and garden centers.

Information obtained from: Environmental Protection Agency Office of Prevention, Pesticides and Toxic Substances; Journal of the National Cancer Institute; United States General Accounting Office; Office of NY State Attorney General; United States Federal Code; National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences Journal.



Organic Lawn Care Program

Feed The Soil – One of the best things you can do for your soil is to rake one-half inch of compost into your lawn each spring and fall. To speed up this soil building process you may want to add microbial inoculants. These “good” bacteria and fungi support beneficial microbes that are essential to growing healthy turf. A soil test may identify the need for other soil amendments, such as rock dust or lime.

Feed The Grass – Leave grass clippings on the lawn. They provide nitrogen and reduce the amount of fertilizer needed by about one half. If you want to give your lawn an extra boost in the spring, choose a low nitrogen water insoluble organic fertilizer with a NPK (nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium) ratio of approximately 3-1-2.

Re-seed Annually – A thick turf is one of the best ways to control weeds. Seed in late summer or early fall with a mixture of indigenous grasses. Core or slice aeration of the soil before seeding will improve germination and alleviate compaction.

Mow High – Cut grass at 3-3¹/₂ inches, allowing it to shade its roots, conserve moisture and keep out weeds. High mowing is a better method for controlling crabgrass than herbicides. Keep blades sharp so they do not tear the grass, making it vulnerable to disease. Rotate mowing patterns.

Water Less, But Longer – Once-a-week watering in the early morning for several hours is the best method. Take into consideration the rainfall and type of soil you have. Sandy soil needs more water than clay-based soil.

Control Those Weeds – If you really don't like dandelions, dig them out! But you can also use an organic corn-gluten product that prevents weed seeds from germinating. It must be applied to established (not newly seeded) lawns early in the spring for several years to control problem areas. For spot weed control on driveways and walkways, use a vinegar or vinegar combination product.

Control Pests Without Chemicals – Common pests (grubs, sod webworms, chinch bugs) can be controlled with applications of beneficial nematodes. Milky spore powder is another effective control for Japanese beetle grubs. Fungal diseases can be treated with several light applications of compost or liquid compost “tea”. Beneficial organisms in healthy soil will out-compete unwanted pests.

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