



LAWN PESTICIDES

An Unacceptable Risk



Lured by powerful advertising and eye-catching store displays, Americans spend seven hundred million dollars each year to purchase almost seventy million pounds of lawn pesticides. Notably absent from the colorful advertising and displays are warnings about the possible risks to our health, even from casual exposure to these powerful chemical poisons. Some of the most common lawn products contain chemicals that have been associated with several types of cancer, neurological and developmental problems, endocrine disruption, asthma, reproductive harm and birth defects. The environmental impacts also raise grave concerns, including the contamination of our drinking water supplies and the deaths of millions of wild birds and other wildlife from accidental ingestion or contamination of their habitats.



Government regulations concerning the marketing of these products do little to protect the consumer. Although product labels are required by law to disclose the acute health effects of exposure to a pesticide product (i.e. respiratory effects and eye and skin irritation), they do not warn of more serious chronic or long-term health effects. Nor do they warn individuals who are particularly vulnerable to chemical exposures, such as children, pregnant women and people with asthma, allergies and chemical sensitivities. An EPA registration number listed on a product does not mean that the product is safe, even when used as directed.

The good news is that you can have a beautiful healthy lawn without using pesticides and synthetic fertilizers! Pesticides actually destroy the beneficial organisms in the soil that nature has provided to keep your lawn free from insects, weeds and diseases. When you feed your soil with the appropriate nutrients, it will provide, in turn, the optimal growing conditions for your lawn. According to a recent survey by the National Gardening Association, an estimated 8.1 million households nationwide will use all natural or organic methods for their lawns and landscapes this year. Join the growing number of families that are enjoying their safe lawns and protecting their environment!

“Every day of every week we are continuing in this country to expose children to chemicals whose toxicity is simply not known. As a pediatrician, I urge parents to think carefully about the choices they make, especially about pesticides.”

Philip J. Landrigan, M.D.

Director of the Center for Children’s Health and the Environment, Mount Sinai School of Medicine

Pesticides and Children

Children are uniquely vulnerable to toxic exposures because of their small, rapidly developing bodies and typical behavior which includes playing on lawns and floors and putting unwashed hands in their mouths. In addition to the exposure on lawns, parks and playing fields, studies show that lawn pesticides can easily find their way into homes through open screens and the soles of shoes where they accumulate in carpeting and dust. Pesticides that are designed to breakdown by sunlight, water and soil microbial activity can remain active inside homes for months. Whether you have children, are expecting a child or hoping to have children in the future, it would be prudent to eliminate the unnecessary use of pesticides for lawn maintenance. Children should also be taught to stay off lawns that display pesticide application flags.



“Pesticides can cause harm to humans, animals and the environment because they are designed to kill or otherwise affect living organisms.”

U.S. Environmental
Protection Agency



Pesticides and Pets



Pets, like children, are at greater risk of exposure to pesticides because they lie and roll on the grass. In addition, they groom themselves by licking their paws and fur and sleep on floors where pesticides have been tracked indoors. A National Cancer Institute study showed that dogs whose owners treated their lawns with 2,4-D herbicide products four or more times per year are twice as likely to contract canine lymphoma. Another study conducted in 2004 by the Purdue University School of Veterinary Medicine showed an increase in the risk of bladder cancer by four to seven times in dogs exposed to herbicides on lawns. To be safe, do not let your dog run or play on lawns when you are out for your daily walk unless you are sure which lawns in your neighborhood are maintained without the use of pesticides.

Websites to Visit for Pesticide Info

Grassroots Environmental Education

www.grassrootsinfo.org

*General information on environmental
toxins and their effect on human health.*

NCAP

www.pesticide.org

*Publications and detailed information
about pesticides.*

NCAMP/Beyond Pesticides

www.beyondpesticides.org

*Learn about pesticide action groups around
the country.*

PANNA

www.pesticideinfo.org

*A database of pesticide chemicals and
scientific information.*

NATURAL TURF PRO

www.NaturalTurfPro.com

*Professional training course for organic
lawn care on DVD.*

Natural Lawn Care: Step by Step

The use of pesticides which destroy beneficial organisms in the soil is contrary to the basic concepts of growing and maintaining beautiful healthy lawns. Here are some simple steps that minimize weeds and insects while at the same time promote the growth of a lush and healthy lawn for your family to enjoy.

Feed the Soil – One of the best things you can do for your soil is to rake an inch or so 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 3-3½ 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.