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GARDEN NOTES

HOME PESTICIDE SAFETY

By Dennis Hinkamp

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Pesticide use is always a controversial issue. Some home gardeners take a nuke ‘em” approach while others try for 100 percent natural control.

We can all agree that if using a pesticide, use it correctly and with care and caution, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. The safe and proper use of a pesticide can prevent a lot of trouble. Most concerns and problems arise when pesticides are used improperly.

“One common complaint about pesticides is the label,” he says. “It has a lot of small print on it, and a few big words that can be difficult to read and understand. The label contains information that must be read in order to use the chemical safely. It is amazing how often pesticides are used without a knowledge of what the chemical is or does.

“I remember a gentleman who wanted to surprise his wife on her birthday by getting rid of all the weeds in the flower beds. He went to the nursery and found a product with a label that said, ‘controls weeds for up to five years.’ He figured this was just the ticket for a wonderful surprise. After applying the product to the flower beds, he decided to read the label so he would know how to surprise his wife. Unfortunately, as he read, he discovered to his surprise, it was actually a soil sterilant. It would not only kill the weeds, but wipe out the trees, shrubs and perennials.”

Pesticide safety begins and ends with the label, Goodspeed emphasizes. Be certain that the pest you want to destroy and the plant or area you plan to treat are listed on the label. If in doubt, ask a certified nurseryman in the nursery or garden center for help. Don’t guess.

What do you tell someone who has just sprayed their apple tree with a product not registered or labeled for use on an apple tree?

“I tell them what the law says. If apples are not on the label, you cannot harvest them,” he says. “This is not a popular response, and I’ve had a few people upset with me. Sometimes they act as if I had been the one to spray the tree and cause the problem. The label acts as the law concerning pesticide usage. Not following the instructions is actually breaking the law.”

Goodspeed offers these additional tips on safe use of pesticides:

- Mix the product properly and apply the correct amount. It amazes me how often I hear, “Well, I figured it was a really mean insect, and so I doubled . . . er-r-r okay, tripled the concentration just to make sure I killed him.” More is not better when it comes to pesticides. Many tests are done to calculate the amount needed for proper control. Increasing the amount only puts you and the environment in danger.
- Wear protective clothing. Additional safety information found on the label includes what protective clothing to wear while applying the chemical. As a minimum, wear a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, a protective hat, proper shoes or boots and protective eye-wear.
- Be especially careful when mixing the product. The full concentration is obviously more toxic than the diluted spray in the tank. Wettable powders, such as Imidan, tend to fly in your face when adding the water, if you are not careful.
- Mix only what you are going to use. Most pesticides do not store for any length of time in a spray tank.
- Keep the original container, and only buy in small quantities. Try to buy just what will be needed for the summer, then storage should not be a problem. If you are currently storing any pesticides be certain they are in a safe, locked area away from children and pets.

For more information, contact your local [USU County Extension office](#).

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