

Friday's Feature

By

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Pesticide safety – it's common sense

Pesticides used properly by home gardeners are a valuable pest management tool that can protect plants against disease, weed, and insect pests. But used improperly, pesticides pose a serious risk to public health and the environment. Since poison prevention week is March 18-24, it's a perfect time to remind gardeners to keep safety in mind before you start applying pesticides.

To avoid or reduce the need for pesticides in your home garden, follow good gardening practices. Keeping your soil and plants healthy discourages pests from multiplying.

Test your soil and enrich with organic material, if needed. Select native plants or plants that are adapted to your climate and soils. Do not crowd plants. Crowding weakens plants and decreases air circulation which promotes disease organisms and other pests. Avoid overwatering. Practice good garden sanitation. Remove dead vegetation that can harbor or overwinter pests.

If you really need a pesticide follow these simple tips.

Buy only what you need. Be a smart shopper and protect the environment by purchasing and using only what you need to do the job.

Identify the pest to be controlled. Pest identification is *the* critical step in determining the right pesticide to use. Contact your county Extension office for assistance with identification. Once the pest is identified, match a pesticide product with the pest. Read the "pest controlled" section on the pesticide label before purchasing the product.

You should never assume that a product will control a pest that is not listed on the label. It may, but there is no guarantee and if a control failure occurs, then the manufacturer or retailer can't assume responsibility.

Apply pesticides correctly. Careful application can prevent pesticides from entering waterways and impacting the environment. Remember to read the directions carefully before spraying and water-in pesticides only if required on the label. Take care to apply the spray or granules only to the target plant or site. Do not allow pesticides to contact and stay on driveways, sidewalks, or other hard surface areas.

It may be human nature to think that if a little of something is good, a lot must be better; but regarding pesticides, this is a dangerous misconception that can have disastrous consequences.

Store unused pesticides correctly. All pesticides should be stored out of the reach of children and pets in their original containers. If you cannot read the label on an old product, do not use it. In general, pesticides should be stored in a cool and dry location.

Dispose of pesticide containers appropriately. For disposal, there are several safe options. Pouring pesticides down drains, toilets, or sewers should not be considered. Putting unused pesticides in the trash is not environmentally friendly and may be unacceptable. The most viable option is to apply them to an approved site listed on the label.

Another option is to give them to someone who may have a need for the product. A final option is to take them to a household hazardous waste collection event.

Every year poisonings result in nearly 900,000 visits to emergency rooms and some 1,100 deaths. Call the Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222 immediately if a pesticide comes in contact with skin, is inhaled, or is swallowed. If possible, have the container with you when calling.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others. For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to: <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension>.