

Summer Means Pesticide Safety Time

Many homeowners are entering a dangerous period as they begin to care for their lawns and landscapes. A survey of homeowners by the Virginia Cooperative Extension found some alarming gaps in knowledge and safe practices of do-it-yourselfers. A beautiful lawn, shrub or tree isn't worth the trade-off if pesticides are not being used properly.

According to the survey:

- 60% of homeowners reported they don't wear any protective clothing or equipment when applying pesticides.
- More than 40% don't remove toys, pet dishes and lawn furniture before applying pesticides.
- Just 45% follow label directions about when it is safe to re-enter an area sprayed with pesticides.
- Fewer than 5% bothered to warn their neighbors when they were applying pesticides.

Many people don't have to use pesticides at all. Professionals may be able to solve landscape problems without pesticides by choosing non-chemical alternatives, such as sanitation procedures and selecting shrubs and ornamental trees that are less susceptible to diseases and insects. For example, an infestation last year may only require that all the old plant materials be cut out. Often, cultural practices (pruning, raking leaves, etc.) will go a long way toward solving pest problems.

If a homeowner decides to use pesticides, follow these suggestions:

- Identify the pest first. There is no use in applying a pesticide that won't address your pest problem.
- Buy ready-to-use pesticides. They're more expensive, but are less toxic than concentrates and eliminate the chance of exposure during mixture. In addition, they can be purchased in the smaller quantities that homeowners realistically need.
- Buy no more material than you can use in one season. Buying more creates storage problems and potentially expensive disposal problems.
- Don't be tempted to use agricultural chemicals. They aren't designed for use by homeowners. A small miscalculation in the mixing of a small batch could result in drastic overdosing.
- Buy the least toxic chemical. Most chemicals available to homeowners use the signal words "caution," "warning" or "danger" on their labels. Try to avoid those with the "warning" and "danger" labels, as they are more hazardous.
- Never mix herbicides with other kinds of pesticides, and never use the same equipment to spray herbicides and other pesticides. You could unintentionally kill the plants you are trying to protect.
- Always follow label instructions on mixing, application, storage and disposal of pesticides.
- Don't mix or store pesticides in food containers and don't measure pesticides with the measuring cups and spoons you use in the kitchen. Always store pesticides in the original container with the label intact.

All these are common sense precautions, but sometimes people do things without thinking. The best choice of all may be to consult a professional who can diagnose pest problems and recommend chemical or non-chemical alternatives. Contact the licensed tree experts at Pardoe's Lawn and Tree Care Service at 800-427-4890.

