

Aren't Lawn Pesticides Safe?

Pesticides are poisons designed to kill insects and weeds. At the same time, they can have an impact on human health and the environment. Unfortunately, lawn care chemicals don't stay put on lawns. Instead, they end up in our homes where they can impact our health and in our air, water, and soil where they affect wildlife, plants, and local ecosystems. Just because a pesticide is registered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), does not mean that it is safe. In fact, federal law prohibits pesticide manufacturers, distributors, and retailers from making safety claims.



A Limited Resource

The Great Lakes are the source of drinking water for 42 million people in the U.S. and Canada. In the last 100 years we have added tons of toxins to the limited world supply of freshwater. The very same water we pollute is continuously cycling through our air, soils, and waters — and threatening the health and quality of our ecosystems. If we all learn to practice healthy lawn and landscape care, we will be increasing the health of the Great Lakes aquatic ecosystem.

Pesticides and Your Pets

A study of dogs exposed to the most frequently used lawn chemical, 2,4-D, found that when dog owners applied 2,4-D more than four times a year on their lawn the incidence of common canine cancer (canine malignant lymphoma or CML) doubled. According to the National Cancer Institute, dogs with CML were 30% more likely to have lived in a home where the owners had applied 2,4-D or employed a commercial lawn company to treat their yard.




Lawn to Lake is a collaborative program to protect water resources in the Great Lakes region by promoting healthy lawn and landscape practices. With funding from the U.S. EPA Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, partners are coordinating a pollution prevention campaign addressing the needs of those responsible for lawn and landscape care in the Southern Lake Michigan basin. Collaborating partners include Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant, Lake Champlain Sea Grant, Safer Pest Control Project, and University of Illinois Extension.



IISG-12-27



LCSG-12-8

Find us on:  

www.lawntogreatlakes.org

LAWN TO LAKE

Natural Lawn Care for Homeowners

It is possible to have a lawn that looks good and doesn't harm your health or the environment. Natural lawn care restores balance to the soil system — the microbes, organic matter, soil structure and nutrients that make a healthy lawn possible. Over time, your lawn will require less watering, fertilizing, and mowing — saving you time and money.

Follow these basics to get the results you want!

Pesticides

Pesticides Degrade the Soil

Common pesticides have been found to kill beneficial organisms in the soil that break down organic matter and make nutrients available to the lawn, as well as beneficial insects (like ladybugs and praying mantises) that are part of your lawn's natural defenses.

Pesticides Pollute Water

When it rains, pesticides and fertilizers run off our lawns into storm drains, and then into our water. The United States Geological Survey found one or more pesticides in every surface water they tested, and one-third of all major groundwater aquifers — both sources often used for drinking water.

Pesticides can be Harmful to Human Health and Wildlife

Children are more vulnerable than adults to the health risks of pesticides. They are also exposed to higher amounts of pesticides because they often play on the ground where pesticide residues concentrate and put things in their mouths. Studies have found links between the use of lawn pesticides and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, asthma, hormonal issues, weakened immune function and acute leukemia.

Pesticides in water sources have been linked to abnormal development in amphibians and lead to reproductive, behavioral, immune system and neurological problems. Many pesticides are extremely toxic to pollinators and to aquatic life, such as fish and frogs.

Natural Lawn and Landscaping Practices

- Focus on building healthy soil.
- Conduct a soil test to learn what nutrients may be needed for proper plant growth.
- Leave lawn clippings on the yard to add beneficial nutrients to the soil.
- Add a top dressing of compost if nutrients are needed.
- Mow lawns high to build deep roots.
- Use as little pesticides and fertilizers as possible. These chemicals kill beneficial organisms in the soil.
- Use an integrated pest management (IPM) approach when managing pests and plant disease.
- Choose the right plant for the right place. Consider light, type of soil and water needs.
- Consider lawn alternatives such as native plants
- Landscape your property in a way that considers what is downstream. Everyone's actions have effects on those downstream.
- Consider how water flows on your property during a rainstorm. Place plants so that they drink up water instead of having it run off your yard.
- Consider putting in a rain garden.
- Get to know your watershed.



Did you Know?

Weed and Feed Products

Weed and feed products are a mixture of herbicides (weed killers) and fertilizers, and most of them contain pesticides (including 2,4-D, dicamba, and MCPP), which can be harmful to humans, especially children. They can also harm wildlife and cause ground and surface water contamination. Consider alternatives before applying weed and feed to your lawns.

Banish Weeds Naturally

Consider using corn gluten (an organic corn by-product that is a natural pre-emergent weed control) to reduce weeds. Apply it early in the season before the soil reaches 55 degrees (usually when the forsythia bloom), and it will, over the course of a few growing seasons, make a big difference. Invest in a sturdy weeding tool and go after weeds for short periods on a regular basis, rather than all at once. Don't be so focused on a perfect green lawn, instead realize that a healthy lawn can naturally resist disease and drought.

