

Safety of pesticides concerns gardeners

Many Canadian gardeners inquire about the relative safety of various pesticides they use in their garden. For up-to-date information, the Canadian Garden Council sought data from the Crop Protection Institute of Canada, specifically the lawn and garden section of the Institute.

The institute has a new pamphlet entitled "Q and A on Pesticides for your Lawn and Garden." The pamphlet answers 16 commonly asked questions about lawn and garden pesticides. For example, one of the most common questions in gardeners' minds has to do with just what an "organic or natural pesticide" is and the difference between "organic or natural" products vs. the chemical pesticides. The pamphlet states: "Organic" or "natural" pesticides are terms commonly applied to organisms and chemicals found naturally in the environment.

Although it may be perceived that these products are safer than those produced synthetically, this is not necessarily the case. Many synthetic chemicals are less toxic than those that occur naturally.

"Both synthetically produced and organic pesticides require the same extensive and stringent federal government evaluation and approval. For example, Nicotine Sulphate, formerly used to control

(garden) insects, is a highly toxic, naturally occurring product which is no longer registered for use as a pesticide."

Another frequently asked question about garden pesticides has to do with contact by children and/or pets. "There is no such thing as zero risk. Every time you handle a pet, play a sport, cross the street or ride in a car, there is risk. By taking reasonable precautions and following directions, we can minimize unnecessary risk with pesticide use."

"Keep children and pets out of any area during pesticide application and until the area is dry, which may be up to 24 hours."

"In all cases, applicators should avoid skin contact with pesticides. Skin should be covered with protective clothing such as rubber gloves, long-sleeved shirts, long pants and boots."

Having received the answer about children and pets, gardeners often ask about the potential hazard from pesticides to birds, worms, bees, and non-target plants. The new pamphlet explains: "All pesticides must be biologically active to do their job properly, so they may affect non-target plants and animals. Careful observance of label instructions, will minimize any hazards to other species."

Since the introduction of phosphate-free laundry detergents,

some gardeners are concerned about the pollution of water by pesticides. The Crop Protection Institute says: "Home and garden pesticides and fertilizers are used in small quantities. When used according to directions, they will not percolate through the soil into drinking water or groundwater."

"It is still up to us to eliminate any possibility of risk due to human error through safe handling. To help minimize harm, avoid spraying near water and do not wash containers in streams or lakes. All empty containers should be rinsed three times within the treated area, and disposed of in regular garbage."

The word biodegradable has become a buzz word today, and gardeners occasionally ask about the biodegradability of pesticides. The new pamphlet explains it thus: "Pesticides and fertilizers all degrade in the environment, but the rate of breakdown varies with each product. Some compounds may react with moisture in the soil or in plants, or they may be broken down by sunlight if they remain on the plant or soil surface. If not overused, the nutrients in fertilizers will be used by the plants, and none will persist in soil or leach to water."

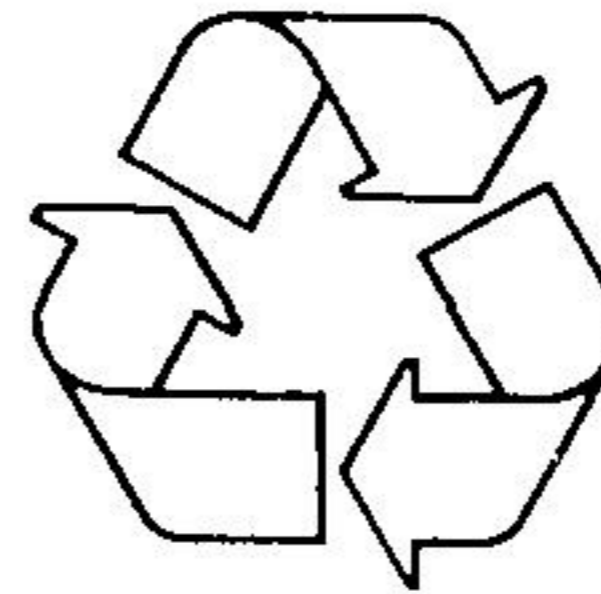
"However, most pesticides degrade as a result of the normal metabolic processes of plants or soil bacteria. The degradation ultimate-

ly leads to the formation of harmless substances such as carbon dioxide and water.

"Extensive testing of each product by manufacturers both in laboratories and in the environment analyses pesticide degradation and metabolism to ensure that they are not harmful to humans and the ecology."

The information here is from the

pamphlet "Q and A on Pesticides for your Lawn and Garden." It is not a publication of the Canadian Garden Council. Free copies of the pamphlet, and another, "Science and Sensible Gardening - The Balanced Approach to Pest Control," are available from the Crop Protection Institute of Canada, 21 Four Seasons Pl., Suite 627, Etobicoke, Ont. M9B 6J8.



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