

# House & Garden



## Givin' you the dirt

by Sean James  
The Compass

### The Chemical Controversy

Chemicals. Such a hullabaloo.

We are bombarded with information from both sides. "We must ban all use of chemicals for the good of the environment and our children." "Now is the time to fertilize your lawn and garden for a healthier, greener landscape." Which is the right opinion?

Neither is totally correct. The best route to landscape and environmental health is called Integrated Pest Management or IPM. IPM is the use of cultural, biological and chemical methods together choosing the least harmful and most effective method first, resorting to chemicals only when necessary. Begin by choosing plants or turf resistant to problems. In the case of turf grass, practically any grass is more resistant to disease than standard Kentucky Bluegrass. Overseed with the resistant grass type to strengthen your turf.

Next, use cultural methods to reduce disease and keep plants healthy. Topdressing your lawn with one-half inch of well-rotted compost is proven to make grass greener and help fight disease. Compost contains beneficial fungi that kill other harmful fungi. Putting a six-inch layer of compost out to the edge of the canopy around trees will do more than any

other treatment to help the tree overcome problems. Proper pruning and mowing will also help reduce disease. Trees should be pruned so air can flow through the canopy to prevent fungal infection. Turf should be mowed often so no more than one third is being cut off. Mowing turf frequently helps control weeds by promoting a thick (2½ to 3" high) lawn.

The last step before using chemicals is to look at biological controls. For example, nematodes (microscopic worms) feed on white grub. Ask around at local garden centres to find biological controls. The more we ask, the more the horticultural industry will move to address demand.

Chemical controls are the last resort. Look at the problem logically and determine if you can put up with weeds or the disease. Ask yourself, "Is it going to get worse and how long can I wait?" Ask the experts and read. Once you've determined that you need to use chemicals, look for the most innocuous to do the job WELL. Don't wimp out and use a "friendly" chemical such as Safer's Soap if it's not going to do the job. The insect will develop resistance. On the other hand, don't use a sledgehammer to kill a mosquito. Safer's

Soap is fine to control aphids. Instead of having your lawn regularly sprayed for weeds, spot spray in August (the best time for long term control).

A quick and controversial word about fertilizer...I believe that IF you NEED to fertilize your lawn to address some problem, the best times to fertilize are mid-June and mid-August. Fertilizing in early spring only makes the lawn green up a couple of weeks earlier. You'll need to mow it more often and may develop an overly thick thatch layer, which can harbour disease and insects. Your turf will produce tons of leaves and not enough roots making it an easy target for insects and fungus. Finally, you will pollute your water and world with heart attack-causing nitrates and plug lakes with algal blooms.

Only fertilize if you have a problem. Our world will take a great leap forward when a green lawn in early spring or in the heat of summer is seen as an unhealthy thing. It should not be green then. A lawn growing moderately, with a few bugs, a few weeds and a bit of disease should be seen as beautiful because it's natural and healthy.

Responsible landscaping is more work! There are very few 'good' things in life that are easy but they are still worth learning about and doing. Don't use chemicals just because someone's advertising now's the right time and don't shun chemicals totally because of a few alarmists.

My final, (too preachy?) words: "Moderation in all things."



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- spot treatment in lawns

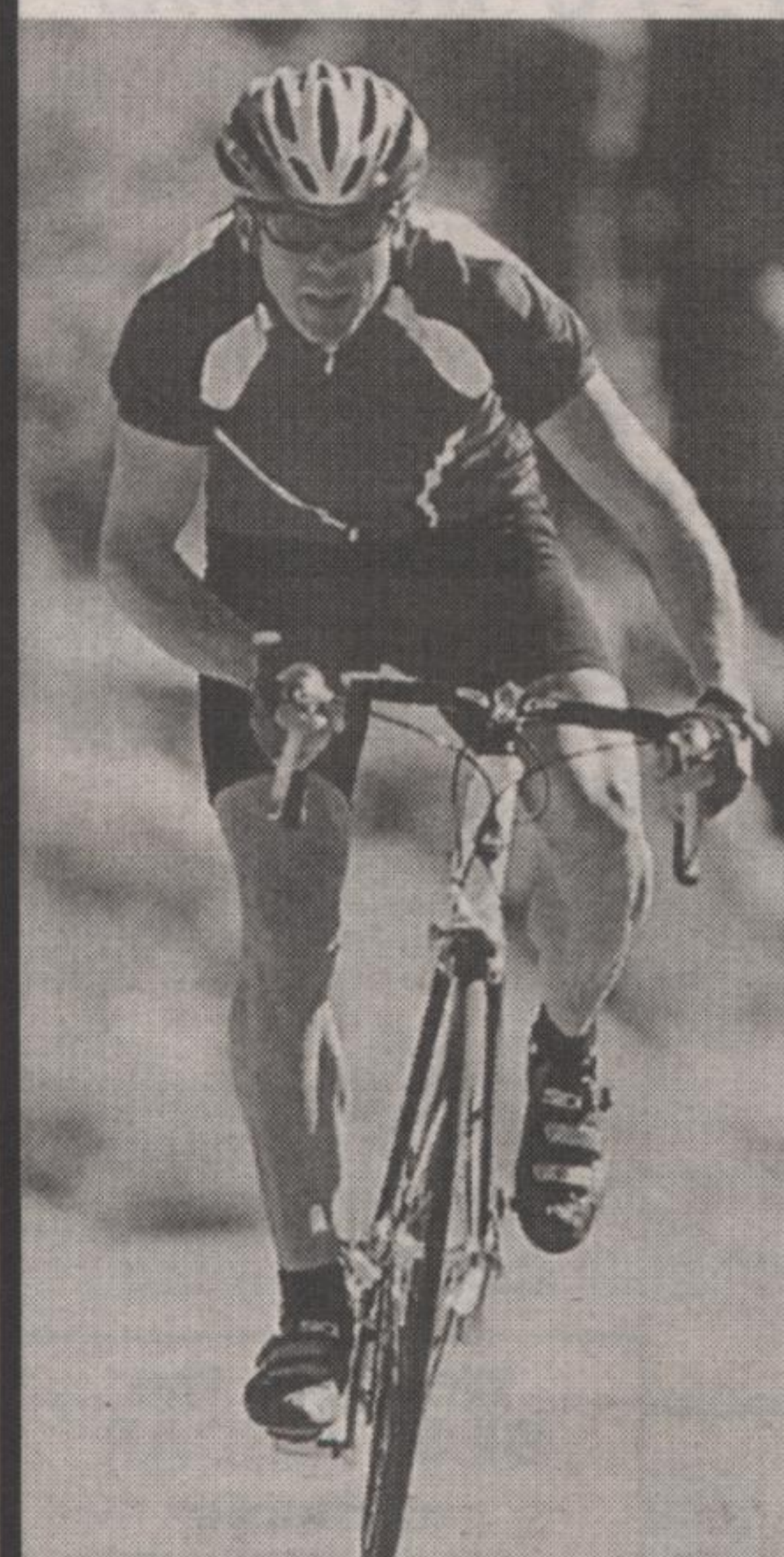
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