

No training at all necessary to sell pesticides to the public

July 2005

This is a comment on the Star Phoenix July 2nd, 2005 article: **Well-intentioned 'dinner' can be deadly**, by Jim Hole, Gardening for the Prairies.

I would like to thank Mr Hole and the Star Phoenix for a timely article. A recent CBC noon edition garden line also fielded a question in the same line: the person has used Roundup on her lawns and all the grass died too.

Mr Hole mentioned how it infuriates him that gardens are ruined because "a salesperson didn't have the proper training to make the correct recommendation." Then he faults salespeople and retailing companies, as well as gardeners.

I think Mr Holes forgets to also assign blame on the Canadian government and the Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture and Foods. Yes, Saskatchewan is the last province in Canada where the fox guards the chickens.

Why are salespeople not trained either by the retailer or by the companies producing the pesticide formulations?

In large part it's because there is absolutely no provincial requirement for licensing or training of ANYONE working in businesses exclusively handling domestic pesticides (sold without a license to the public) as you can see in the quote below:

"Pesticide Vendor license is required by all pesticide retailers who sell pesticides to licensed applicators or farmers. Each vendor must employ at least one dispenser at each outlet covered by the pesticide vendor license. License fee is \$50".

<http://www.publications.gov.sk.ca/details.cfm?p=68>

Furthermore, until their February 2005 2,4-D draft review, the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA)* apparently had no idea how many Weed and Feed products were registered in Canada or what they contained, other than saying that the pesticide regulations applied to those products too. Now they should know, because I personally sent them the list of Weed-and-Feed products, which I obtained from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Yes, in Canada, Weed-and-Feed are only registered under the Fertilizer Act, not under the Pesticide Act.

Why should anyone be careful with a product which is only registered as a fertilizer? Do you think people who have not read the label will use the safety precautions described on the label?

This is how our governments look after our safety and our environment.

Such incidents illustrate why a pesticide bylaw is necessary: to protect the environment as well as public health.

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* The Canadian agency responsible for licensing pesticides in Canada, operating under the Federal Dept of Health.

Sat 02 Jul 2005

The Saskatoon StarPhoenix

Well-intentioned 'dinner' can be deadly

by Jim Hole, Gardening for the Prairies

Over the years, I've dealt with many frantic gardening couples. One of the most common scenarios involves one half of the couple pointing the finger at the other about the misapplication of a chemical in the yard.

When the right chemical goes in the wrong place, the consequences for your plants can be catastrophic.

Weed and Feed, a popular gardening product marketed under several different brand names, can be quite useful when properly applied, but its name has caused some confusion. As a result, more than one gardener has thought, "Wow, the perfect product -- not only will it feed my flowers, it'll kill the weeds, too!"

If only it were that simple.

Weed and Feed is a fertilizer combined with a herbicide such as 2, 4-D; it's meant to be used only on lawns. Lawns -- and grasses in general -- have a different metabolism than broad-leaved plants such as annuals, perennials, trees and shrubs. 2, 4-D is a selective herbicide: that is, it will kill broadleaf weeds like dandelions and thistle while leaving grasses (and, unfortunately, the weed quackgrass fits into this category) unscathed. As the weed killer does its work, the fertilizer feeds the grass, encouraging vigorous growth.

But while the herbicide in Weed and Feed discriminates between grasses and broadleaf plants, it can't discriminate between broadleaf weeds and broadleaf ornamentals, fruits and vegetables. When Weed and Feed is used in flowerbeds, virtually every plant -- weeds, flowers, vegetables and all -- will be either destroyed or, at the very least, severely damaged.

Once Weed and Feed is spread into a flowerbed, the damage to the flowers shows up very quickly. Bedding plants such as alyssum or marigolds and vegetables such as potatoes and tomatoes are extremely sensitive to 2, 4-D and will soon suffer severe injury. On a warm day, with the plants' metabolism and growth rate accelerated, the 2, 4-D will be absorbed and plant injury sustained within hours.

Geraniums, salvia and many trees and shrubs aren't quite as sensitive to low concentrations of 2, 4-D, but if you were to apply even a moderate rate of the herbicide to the foliage of these plants, you can expect rather severe damage.

Symptoms of 2, 4-D damage are always worst at the growing points of affected plants, because the herbicide is absorbed by the leaves and translocated (transported) through the plant's vascular system to these growing points. Cupping and twisting of the new growth is often diagnostic of a misapplication of this herbicide. Eventually, if they received a high enough dose, the plants will wither and die.

The Only Cure

Unfortunately, little can be done to save plants that have been accidentally exposed to 2, 4-D. Applying water to the soil to wash away the herbicide, which might seem the logical solution at first glance is ineffective; in fact, the water may speed up absorption of the herbicide into its stems and leaves.

The only real solution is time. 2, 4-D won't harm the soil in the long term; in fact, there are several soil micro-organisms that treat 2, 4-D as just another food source. Over the summer, provided the concentration of herbicide isn't too high, these micro-organisms will break the herbicide down completely into its component elements: carbon, nitrogen and chlorine. This may take three or four months, depending on soil composition, moisture and temperature, but once the herbicide has broken down, it's safe to replant.

Read Before You Feed

Most of the misapplications of Weed and Feed that I've come across arise simply because the right product is used for the wrong purpose. And to be honest, it infuriates me that people's gardens are ruined because a salesperson didn't have the proper training to make the correct recommendation. I don't fault these salespeople as much as I fault the companies that retail the product, who often fail to provide anything beyond the most rudimentary training.

Of course, part of the blame must be assigned to gardeners who fail to read the label before applying garden products. But then again, how many of us can honestly say that we've thoroughly read any set of instructions, whether they're for the car, the fridge or the DVD player?

Education -- even in the form of something as simple as a label -- can be the key to avoiding catastrophes large and small.

Hole's latest book is What Grows Here?

Volume Two: Problems.

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