

What You Should Know About Lawn Care Products and Services

Q. What are the rules for properly using lawn care pesticides?

A. A healthy lawn can out-compete most weeds, survive most insect attacks, and fend off most diseases before these problems get the upper hand. Pesticides (the generic term for insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides) are meant to kill or control weeds, harmful insects, and fungal and other diseases. The benefit of pesticides is their ability to stop a pest (weed, insect, or disease) problem that has become out of control and threatens your lawn's health. Pesticides do pose some risk, and their use cannot be made completely safe. Don't be tempted to rely solely on pesticides as quick-fix solutions to your lawn problems. Serious pest problems are often a sign that your lawn is not getting everything it needs. Because the pests are symptoms of an underlying problem, you need to simultaneously correct the underlying problem and control the pest. Otherwise, the pest may return in even greater numbers than before.

Keep in mind:

- **Pesticides are not harmless.** Read the entire label and follow the label directions completely. (This includes application rates and techniques; all safety precautions, including protective clothing; and re-entry precautions to minimize potential exposure to the materials.)
- **Use pesticides to control pests** because it's usually impossible to eradicate them.
- **Be sure you accurately identify the pest** so that you can choose the best pesticides for the job. Use them at the proper time for optimum control.
- **Spot treat whenever possible.** There's no need to blanket the entire lawn to cure a localized problem. Applying more than you need is wasteful and can be environmentally unsound.
- **Treat problems early.** You'll have more options and better results if you stop pests before they become strongly entrenched.
- **Store all pesticides (lawn care and other household pesticide products) in a secure location** to protect against accidental contact by family members or pets.

Q. How safe are the lawn care pesticides used by lawn care professionals and homeowners?

A. As a homeowner, you need to know that using pesticides does pose some risk, and their use cannot be made completely safe. The level of risk posed by a chemical depends on its toxicity and the level of exposure. Improper or inappropriate use of pesticides and other lawn care products by either homeowners or lawn care professionals can increase the level of exposure, which, in turn, increases the level of risk posed to human health and the environment.

Q. How can I minimize risks to me and my family?

A. The simplest way to minimize risk is to limit your exposure to pesticides. If you apply pesticides yourself, read the entire label and follow all instructions, especially those for protective clothing requirements. Be sure to store all pesticides securely and out of the reach of children and pets. Regardless of whether you or a professional applies the pesticide, keep people and pets off the treated lawn immediately after it has been applied.

Although the labels for many products used on home lawns have no specific recommendations for re-entry, a good rule of thumb is to stay off a treated area until it has thoroughly dried, or, if possible, for 24 hours following a pesticide application. Some granular pesticide labels recommend, or require, that the materials be watered in. In this case, the area should not be entered until after the watering is completed and the area is completely dry. If there are any special label directions, your applicator should provide this information at the time of application.

Q. Do lawn care professionals use products that pose greater risks than those used by homeowners?

A. The pesticides regularly used by lawn and landscape care professionals are usually the same as “general-use” products available to homeowners. Licensed professionals occasionally use “restricted-use” products (materials not available to the general public) to solve pest problems that don’t respond to general-use products. Be sure to ask your service provider whether any restricted-use pesticides will be included in your treatment program. Your lawn or landscape care professional should provide information about the nature of the products applied, their restrictions, the reason for their use, and the cautions associated with the products.

Generally, lawn care products are labeled with the same rates, the same precautions, and the same usage information, whether they’re packaged for

personal or commercial use. Products purchased by lawn and landscape care professionals may be packaged in concentrates for shipping convenience and economy. But, before these products are applied to a lawn, they are diluted to the same strength as the ready-to-use products sold directly to homeowners.

Q. Who regulates lawn care products and services?

A. The following entities are responsible for regulating lawn care products and services:

1. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA), all lawn care products that contain pesticides must be registered with EPA before they can be lawfully sold or distributed. When EPA registers a product, its approval should not be taken as a recommendation or endorsement of the product. EPA must ensure that the pesticide, when used according to label directions, can be used with a reasonable certainty of no harm to human health and without posing unreasonable risks to the environment. To make such determinations, EPA requires a wide variety of scientific studies and tests from applicants, which it reviews to determine if the pesticide meets the current safety standard. EPA is reviewing older pesticides (those initially registered before November 1984) under the FIFRA to ensure that they meet current scientific and regulatory standards. This process, called reregistration, considers the human health and ecological effects of pesticides and results in actions to reduce risks that are of concern. An amendment to FIFRA in 1996, the Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA), required EPA to consider the combined exposures from food, drinking water, and other nonoccupational sources, which could include lawn care uses. As the reregistration program is approaching its successful completion, the registration review program mandated by the FQPA will ensure a continuing review of all pesticides on the market for the future.

2. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC). The FTC has regulatory powers covering advertising in any medium, whether transmitted orally or in written form. The FTC requires that all advertising materials and claims, including sales presentations, must be scientifically accurate and not deceive consumers.

3. State governments. Virtually all states require licensing and testing before a company can apply pesticides commercially. Many states also evaluate pesticide advertising within their borders. The responsible state agency is usually the Department of Environmental Protection or Conservation, the Department of Agriculture, or the State Attorney General. If you use a commercial lawn care or pest-control company, be sure that the company is licensed by your state.

Q. How can I find out when pesticide applications have been made or will be made on my lawn or my neighbor's lawn?

A. Upon request, lawn and landscape care professionals should provide information to homeowners and adjacent neighbors about the pesticides used and the application schedule. Most lawn care companies will provide information in advance about the products used in their service programs. And, in some states, they are required to provide copies of product labels to you at the time of sale or upon request. If you have not received a label for a product you are interested in, ask your lawn care professional. Some states require posting a notice after pesticides have been applied. Several states offer a registry, which lists those who wish to be notified when adjacent properties will be treated with pesticides. Even in areas where a registry does not exist, good professional companies are willing to provide notification to you upon request.

Q. Whom should I call if I have questions about the products I have used?

A. If you have professional lawn or landscape care, contact your service provider. If you have a question concerning products you have purchased for do-it-yourself lawn care, contact the store or lawn and garden center where the materials were purchased. If you don't obtain satisfactory answers, contact the state agency that is responsible for regulating lawn care products and companies. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency also offers a toll-free number for information on pesticides: (800) 858-7378.

Q. What do the terms "natural" and "organic" mean in terms of lawn care products?

A. There are no universally accepted definitions, but commonly accepted definitions of these terms are:

- **Natural.** A product derived from animal/ biological, mineral, or plant sources, in a form substantially as it occurs in nature. The materials may be altered or manipulated to put them in a physical form that allows them to be efficiently used in the application process by homeowners or service providers.
- **Organic.** Any substance containing the element carbon is, by technical definition, organic. Both naturally occurring and manmade products may be organic. The common misconception that "organic" and "natural" have the same meaning may cause nontechnical consumers to believe that a manmade organic material is natural when it is not.

- **Natural-based.** This term is generally used to describe a mixture of materials that includes some materials that may be properly described as natural. The portion that is natural is frequently undefined. The other portion may be manmade pesticides or fertilizers.
- **Organic-based.** This term is generally used to describe a mixture of materials that includes some organic materials. The portion of the product that is both organic and natural is frequently undefined. The other portion may be manmade
- pesticides or fertilizers.

It's important to understand that "natural" and "organic" products are not free from risk. If your service provider uses any of the terms above, ask what they mean. You also may want to ask some of the following questions:

- Do the products used or services rendered contain or use any materials that are subject to EPA regulation and registration? Any product claiming to prevent, destroy, repel, or mitigate any pest, such as insects, weeds, or disease, requires state and EPA registration and is classified as a pesticide.
- Are these materials manmade or naturally occurring?
- Are weed, insect, and disease controls a part of the product or service?
- What proportion or percentage (25 percent, 50 percent?) of the active ingredients and of the total applications is manmade materials?

Q. What is Integrated Pest Management (IPM)?

A. An IPM program is one designed to create a healthy lawn with sufficient plant strength and density to survive weed, insect, and disease attacks with minimum pesticide use. An IPM program must consider your lawn's specific needs and overall condition. An IPM program requires the support of proper cultural practices, including:

- Proper mowing practices
- Regular watering at a rate that ensures that moisture levels will be retained throughout the root zone
- Core aeration designed to promote root development through reduced soil compaction, improve nutrient and moisture absorption, and discourage thatch development
- Programmed seeding, sodding, plugging or sprigging to enhance lawn density and enhance appearance by controlling incursions of undesirable grasses and weeds

- Fertilization to provide essential nutrients that may be deficient in your lawn
- pH balancing treatments (lime or sulfur) to achieve proper soil acidity levels and improved nutrient absorption
- Regular inspection of lawn areas for early detection of the presence of pests

Simply put, IPM is using the best mix of cultural techniques and discreet use of chemical products. However, IPM definitions vary among those who use the term. Ask prospective lawn care or landscape professionals about their IPM definitions, procedures, and techniques. This will enable you to choose a provider that will deliver the care you want. Your cooperation in mowing, watering, and regular inspections (for early detection) between your service provider's visits is important to ensure successful IPM care of your property.

NOTE: This information was reviewed for accuracy by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency prior to its distribution. EPA does not endorse any product or service.

Part of the Pesticide Environmental Stewardship Program
An EPA public/private partnership to reduce the risk from pesticides.

"What You Should Know About Lawn Care Products And Services" may be reproduced for use in articles, flyers, mailers, or other publications with the implied permission of PLANET, with PLANET acknowledgment. If you wish to include the EPA Review Statement with your reprint, the Q&A section of the document must appear in its entirety with no deletions or additions.

PLANET
Professional Landcare Network
950 Herndon Parkway, Suite 450
Herndon, VA 20170
(800) 395-2522
LandcareNetwork.org

The association of members who create and maintain the QUALITY OF LIFE in communities across America.