

Pets and Your Lawn

Common Sense Guide to Lawn Care and Pet Safety

Pets are one of the family, and their health and safety are an important consideration. “Pets and Your Lawn” gives you common-sense advice and safety measures to follow when using lawn care products and services.

Caring for your lawn and following proper turf management practices are essential to a healthy lawn, something that benefits you and your family in a multitude of ways: enjoying leisure activities on the thick, cushioned play surface, increasing property values up to 15 percent and, most important, creating a better environment.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recognizes the many benefits of lawns in its pamphlet, “Healthy Lawn, Healthy Environment.” A healthy lawn with thick grass prevents soil erosion, filters contaminants from rainwater, and adsorbs many types of airborne pollutants, like dust and soot. Grass is also highly efficient at converting carbon dioxide to oxygen, a process that helps clean the air. Lawns create a cooling effect for houses as well. The benefits are practically endless, but maintaining healthy lawns requires more than just mowing and watering. Sometimes pests or diseases appear and can ruin a lawn.

It is possible to treat your lawn and keep your pets and family safe. However, because pets enjoy rolling in, sitting on, lying in, and eating grass you must think safety first. Lawn care products are designed and tested for use in a residential environment. Nevertheless, they must be applied according to their directions and certain precautions should be considered to minimize exposure to animals. For starters, correctly determine what kind of insect or weed you are trying to control, and always use the correct control measure or product. The most accurate way to accomplish these measures is to contact a professional with experience and training. After determining the problem, understanding the effective course of treatment is next. At this point, you may decide to hire a professional to complete the job or do it yourself. Be very aware that lawn care professionals take proper precautions as part of their jobs, and when making lawn care product applications, you should, too.

Safety Tips

Using common sense is the key to any safety routine. Here are a few basic safety tips.

- Never over-apply or use a product that is not needed.
- Do not apply lawn control pest products on a windy day. The dust or spray will be hard to control.
- Do not apply lawn pest control products when pets or people are in or around the yard. They could be exposed during the application, before the dust has settled or sprays have dried.
- Remove (the best solution) or at least turn over feeding bowls, water dishes, and birdbaths before pesticide applications. This ensures that dusts or sprays will not settle inside of them, or become mixed with food or water.

- Don't empty food bowls in an area where the food could become contaminated and eaten, such as the lawn or surrounding areas. Either throw the food away or place it inside the house.
- If pets are housed outside, do not apply lawn pest control products in pet houses or directly on pet bedding.
- Follow the manufacturer's directions completely.
- If the material is applied as a liquid spray, wait until it is dry or until the following day before allowing your pet or family back onto the lawn. If the applied product is a dry granular material, watering it down is recommended but not necessary.
- Mark the lawn edges with flags to remind yourself and others that lawn care products have been used.
- Always store pesticide products out of the reach of children and pets. This includes during the time you are applying/using the product. Do not leave seemingly empty containers on the ground or in easy-to-reach places.
- Consult your veterinarian regarding possible interactions between lawn pest control products and pesticides given to or applied on your pets at the same time to control fleas or other parasites.

The greatest risk of adverse effects to a pet from lawn care products comes from pets or consuming a large amount of an improperly diluted or undiluted product, especially from a concentrated product in the original container.

Evaluating Illness

Like people, pets can come down with common illnesses that need medical attention or professional advice. If an illness strikes a pet subsequent to the use of lawn care products, many people assume the product was the cause. If your pet becomes ill, taking it to a licensed veterinarian for assessment is the best course of action. Your veterinarian is responsible for objectively evaluating exposures and attempting to determine whether the illness is due to contact with any chemical(s) used or due to a disease process. Sometimes it is difficult for the veterinarian to differentiate chemical effects from disease processes without the proper information. Make sure your veterinarian has all the information about the products used, including the product label.

Remember, the level of risk posed by any chemical depends on its toxicity and the level of exposure. Lawn care professionals use the same products that homeowners use. Additionally, lawn care professionals have greater experience choosing, using, and storing products properly. Improper or inappropriate use of lawn or household chemicals by *anyone* can increase the level of exposure, which in turn may increase the level of risk posed to your pets or family.

Use common sense and always put safety first. If you follow proper turf management practices, you, your family, and your pets can enjoy a healthy lawn and reap the many rewards it provides.

For more information on lawn care products and pets, the Professional Landcare Network

(PLANET) provides two articles: "Steps Your Veterinarian Should Follow in Evaluating Suspected Pet Illness From Commonly Used Lawn Care Products" and "What to Expect From Your Veterinarian When Investigating a Pet's Exposure to a Lawn Care Product," both written by Robert H. Poppenga, Diplomate of the American Board of Veterinary Toxicologists, DVM, Ph.D.

To request these articles and other helpful information, contact PLANET by e-mailing info@landcarenetwork.org. **If you need advice or assistance with proper turf management practices, contact your local county cooperative extension service or a lawn care provider.**

This project was partially funded by the Office of Pesticide Programs, Office of Prevention, Pesticides & Toxic Substances, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, under Cooperative Agreement #CX820-822 with the National Foundation for IPM Education.

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

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.