

Do it in moderation

When used in heavier-than-recommended concentrations, nearly all yard care chemicals can pose an environmental problem. This not only wastes money, but puts the applicator, family, neighbors, beneficial plants and animals, and downstream waters at risk. Many recommended label rates are already liberal, designed so that products still work under less than optimal conditions.

Even under-application can create problems. If label directions are misread or pesticides are being “sprayed about” in diluted amounts just to use up existing supplies, then chemicals will not be effective and needlessly enter the environment. Also, pest populations subjected to non-lethal doses may begin to genetically develop resistance to the chemicals designed to kill them.

Timing is everything

Using the wrong product, or the right product at the wrong time, again wastes money and needlessly releases chemicals into the environment. If an insecticide label does not indicate effectiveness against a specific pest – or is effective only during a certain stage in the pest’s life cycle – then application can end up harming the wrong thing (like honeybees). Yet the temptation may exist when product “X” is in hand now and worked so well against another pest. However, ignoring basic label directions such as “do not apply if rain is forecast” will, at minimum, result in a chemical application that doesn’t do the job.

Another temptation exists during early spring. A dose of nitrogen fertilizer at that time can “green up” a lawn fast. Peer pressure among neighbors to do likewise may set in. Unfortunately, the green top growth takes place at the expense of the root system. An early appearance of health can later give way to a lawn susceptible to drought. The response may then be more watering (more time, expense and possible problems).

Handle with care

An irony of urban society is that some people are squeamish at the idea of picking bugs off plants by hand, yet find it perfectly acceptable to employ chemicals, some of which are hazardous enough that professionals must be certified to use larger quantities. History has shown that some chemicals initially believed safe have had to be removed from the market after damaging effects were later discovered.

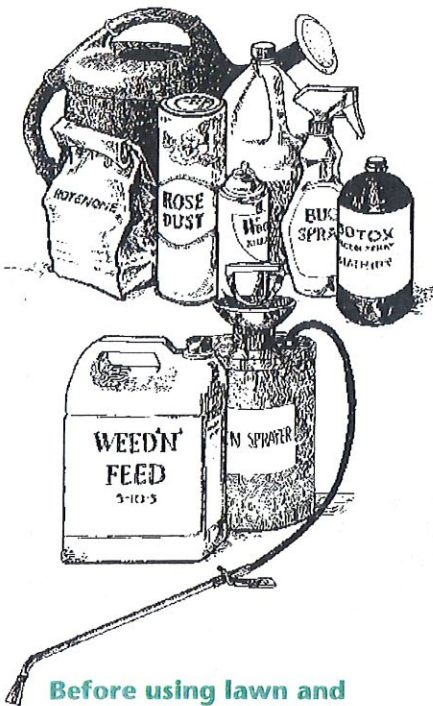
Chemicals spilled on pavement during chemical mixing and loading can quickly be washed away with the next rain to pollute lakes and streams. If not cleaned up, a sometimes-severe health threat may also persist. Fortunately, an impermeable surface can contain some spills and allow time for clean-up.

Buy only what you need

Most people want to solve a perceived yard care problem as easily and economically as possible. But buying ahead is definitely not a good idea. Freezing temperatures, for example, can render surplus volumes of some products useless, although they will remain hazardous. Also, if chemicals pile up in a garage, a temptation may develop to throw out the accumulated mess. Proper pesticide storage and disposal – often overlooked or the last thing considered – can be difficult to do right. Meanwhile, curious children and pets may be at risk.

When in doubt, ask for help

Safe and reliable chemical treatment of some yard care problems is definitely possible for the informed homeowner. The key is to know plants, their pests and the chemicals you plan to use. Rather than attempting to tackle a problem you are not prepared for, it is always better to seek professional assistance and consider more natural alternatives whenever possible.



Before using lawn and garden pesticides, know the plants, their pests and the chemicals you plan to use.