

Read Pesticide Labels Before Application

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When pesticides are applied, the label must be read at purchase and label instructions followed for application. If not, damage or death to nearby plants can happen, especially if herbicides move into soil.

General use pesticides are products homeowners can purchase and apply on their own property. Since most homeowners are not trained in pesticide application like commercial applicators, mistakes are made.

One mistake is applying a pesticide to a site or plant it is not labeled for use. Other mistakes are made when the active ingredient in the product is not checked. The method used to name pesticides can also create confusion.

A common mistake is when a product containing picloram, such as Tordon RTU, is applied in residential landscapes. Picloram is labeled for use as a cut stump treatment to prevent regrowth. However, the label states not to apply it within the root zone of desirable trees. Many cut stumps are in the root zone of nearby healthy trees.

The roots of trees can grow outward up to three times a tree's height. Most landscapes with trees growing in the yard or in neighboring yards are considered to be the root zone of trees and picloram should not be used. Unfortunately, we see trees, and neighboring trees and shrubs, killed when picloram is used.

Other mistakes involve products with the active ingredient imazapyr. Like picloram, this herbicide remains active in soil for a year. Unlike picloram, it is nonselective and kills broadleaf and grass plants. The label states not to use it in locations where plant growth is desired in the next year and that it provides year-long control of grass and weeds.

In a recent case, imazapyr was applied to a new bed being prepared for planting. Fortunately, this mistake was caught prior to planting. In another case it was applied to a site being prepared for seeding turfgrass. After planting, there was zero germination. Neither site can be planted or seeded for at least a year.

Prior to purchase, read labels and understand how pesticides are named. Each pesticide has a trade, common, and chemical name. This can create confusion leading to misapplication.

The trade name is a unique name assigned by the chemical company. It is the name most frequently used for a product. The common name is the general name given to a chemical and is called the active ingredient. The chemical name describes the product's chemistry such as 2,4-Dichlorophenoxyacetic acid for 2,4-D.

While trade names are most often used, it is most important to know what active ingredients are in a product. For example, Roundup is a trade name. However, there are many different Roundup products and each contains different active ingredients. Not all these products can be used in the same way or on the same sites since they contain different active ingredients.

There are also many pesticides sold under different trade names that contain the same active ingredient. And some products have more than one active ingredient, but similar trade names. When checking active ingredients on the label, read past the first line for additional ingredients.

The bottom line is to know what active ingredient is in the product and not just the trade name. Be sure the pesticide is labeled for use on the site or plant you will use it. And follow all label directions such as mixing, application, use precautions, and the waiting period between applications or before seeding or planting can take place.

The pesticide label is a legal document to ensure safe and effective use. Using pesticides against label direction is illegal and can result in unfortunate mistakes.