

With Pesticides on the Way Out, Safer Products Are in

With a ban on two pesticides in the works, now is a good time to look at less toxic pest control

Soon gardeners will see a change in the chemical products available on store shelves to control pests. With the [United States Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) recent ban and phase out of two commonly used pesticides, chlorpyrifos and diazinon, gardeners will be looking for new solutions to their pest problems. The Bay Area Clean Water Agencies have the answers! You can have a gorgeous healthy garden without polluting the environment. Get on board now with the growing trend of using less toxic methods to control common garden pests. Safer products are in!

Why Ban Pesticides?

Chlorpyrifos and diazinon are commonly used household pesticides and are the active ingredients in over 1000 products including bug sprays and insecticides. Believe it or not, these broad-spectrum pesticides are actually related to nerve gas. They act by compromising the nervous systems of exposed organisms. Chlorpyrifos and diazinon are used to kill a wide variety of insect pests, including ants, fleas, cockroaches, aphids, spiders, and wasps. They are also highly toxic to birds, honeybees, and other beneficial insects, and mammals.

That's why the EPA recently announced its decision to phase out residential home and garden use of chlorpyrifos, also known as Dursban or Lorsban, by the end of the year due to the potential health risks to the nervous system of children. In addition to the human impacts, the U.S. EPA determined that chlorpyrifos poses a high risk to birds, fish, and mammals, and a very high risk to aquatic animals.

As of December 31, 2001 stores cannot sell or distribute chlorpyrifos anymore. Diazinon will also be phased out over the next few years. However, these products are still on store shelves. Manufacturers are even heavily promoting these chemicals at sale prices to clear inventory. While it may be tempting to stock up on a favorite pesticide or a less expensive one, think twice! The Bay Area Clean Water Agencies urge consumers to stop using these products. After all, the EPA has scientific evidence that these products pose health risks to children.

The Journey From Garden To Waterways

How do these chemicals get into our waterways in the first place? Everywhere in the Bay Area, with the exception of San Francisco, storm drains carry water from streets, driveways and sidewalks directly to local creeks, the Bay or Delta - with no wastewater treatment. Pesticides runoff lawns and gardens and are carried through the storm drain system when it rains and from overwatering. Pesticides are also carried through the sanitary sewer system from the improper disposal of unused pesticides and the rinsing of equipment and containers into household sinks. Even wastewater that is treated allows some pesticides to pass through without being removed. According to a 1997 study conducted by the Central Contra Costa Sanitary District, 60% of diazinon and chlorpyrifos entering their sewer system came from residential neighborhoods because pesticide products are so widely used. In a study done in the Bay Area, the pesticide diazinon was found in 40 out of 45 samples of storm water taken from street gutters. It's no surprise that in 1998 the EPA designated the San Francisco Bay, along with 35 Bay

Area creeks "impaired" water bodies. They are impaired by pesticides, introduced into the water by the everyday actions of Bay Area residents.

In Store Help for Gardeners

Navigating the aisles of gardening centers and hardware stores in search of a safer chemical that works can be daunting even for conscientious consumers. The good news is that the Bay Area Clean Water Agencies have teamed up with local hardware and garden stores in a program called "Our Water Our World" to help home gardeners make safer product choices easily. The program trains store employees about safer products, and provides information pieces and instore displays aimed at educating Bay Area residents about less toxic pest management.

"There are a wide variety of safer gardening products available that are just as effective as the dangerous pesticides people are accustomed to using," says Tanya Drllk of the Bio-Integral Resource Center.

To know which products can be the most effective and are the least polluting, look for the "Our Water Our World" logo next to products in over 100 participating hardware stores and nurseries throughout the Bay Area. Call 1-888-BAYWISE for a store near you.

Quick Guide to Gardening Without Pesticides

Today's gardeners are looking for ways to manage pest problems without using toxic chemicals. There are a number of treatment methods or controls available to the home gardener. Be a savvy gardener this season and use these safe, effective tips instead.

Physical Controls are barriers such as copper strips to keep snails away from plants, caulk to plug pest entry holes in buildings, or sticky barriers that keep ants out of hummingbird feeders. Your own hands are a physical control when you use them to squash bugs or pick snails off of plants. The humble vacuum and hand weeding has also proved useful.

Cultural controls include designing the garden to minimize pest problems, and doing routine maintenance in ways that keep plants as healthy as possible. For example, diversify your garden and choose the right plant for the right spot. Use mulch to prevent weeds. Take care of your soil. Give plants the right amount of water, prune correctly, and talk to your nursery personnel about naturally pest resistant plants.

Biological controls enlist other living creatures to attack pests. You can find many biological controls such as ladybugs, spiders, and ground beetles thriving naturally in your garden. By adding nectar and pollen rich plants to your garden you can encourage the beneficials to stay and reproduce. You can also buy a wide variety of beneficial organisms at insectories.

Less-toxic chemical controls are the last resort option. If you use chemicals, consider their safety for humans, pets, and the environment. Look for environmentally friendly products that, when used properly, are less disruptive to beneficial organisms and less likely to pollute the environment. These include products such as insecticidal soaps and oils, desiccants (diatomaceous earth and silica aerogel), boric acid and borates, and some botanical pesticides that are derived from plants.

To safely dispose of diazinon, chlorpyrifos, and other unused pesticides, call 1-888-BAYWISE.

