



What You Should Know About Lawn Care Products and Services (Q&A)

The Professional Landcare Network has compiled this information for you, the consumer to answer your questions about the lawn care products and services you use to keep your lawn healthy and attractive.

Q. What are the rules of proper lawn care pesticide use?

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, non-beneficial 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 the health of your lawn.

Remember that pesticides do pose some risk and their use cannot be made completely safe. You should not be tempted to rely solely on pesticides as quick-fix solutions to lawn problems. Serious pest problems are often a sign that your lawn is not getting everything it needs. The pests are symptoms of an underlying problem. You need to correct the underlying problem at the same time you control the pest, or the pest may return in even greater numbers than before. You should keep in mind:

- A pesticide is not harmless. Read the entire label and follow the label directions completely (including application rates and techniques, all safety precautions including protective clothing, and the reentry precautions to minimize potential exposure to the materials.
- Use pesticides to control pests, since it is usually impossible to eradicate them.
- Be sure you accurately identify the pest so that you can choose the best pesticides for the job, and use them at the proper time for optimum control.
- Spot treat whenever possible. There is 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 will 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. Homeowners should be aware that the use of 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 the owner or the lawn care professional can increase the level of exposure, which in turn increases the level of risk posed to human health and the environment.

Q. What can I do to minimize any risks to me or 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 protective clothing requirements. Be sure to store all pesticides securely and out of the reach children and pets. Regardless of whether you or a professional applies the pesticide, keep people and pets off the treated lawn immediately following use.

Although many products used on home lawns have no specific reentry recommendations prescribed by the product label, 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 the homeowner?

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

Lawn care products are generally labeled with the same rates, the same precautions, and the same usage information whether packaged for personal or commercial use. The products purchased by the lawn care professional 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 the homeowner.

Q. Who regulates lawn care products and services?

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

- **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. However, an EPA registration is not equivalent to a recommendation, endorsement, or approval of the product, nor is it a finding of "safety." EPA registration means that pesticide registrants have submitted required scientific data concerning the risks associated with the use of the pesticide. Since many pesticides have been available for a long time, the review process for these products was done many years ago using older scientific standards. FIFRA now requires that EPA undertake the re-registration of any pesticide product registered before November 1984. This includes updating the scientific data base necessary to evaluate the risks and benefits, and reviewing that data according to today's scientific standards. Although the re-registration process is underway, it is anticipated that it will take years to complete. To date, only a few products have been re-registered.
- **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 while not being deceptive to the consumer.
- **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, we suggest you be sure 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, the lawn care professional should provide information to the homeowner and adjacent neighbors regarding 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 for your information 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 following application. Several states offer a registry, that is, a listing of persons 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 individuals upon request.

Q. What do the terms “natural” and “organic” mean with regard to lawn care products?

A. There are no universally accepted definitions, but possible 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 the homeowner or lawn care professional.
- **Organic.** Any substance containing the element carbon is, by technical definition, organic. Both naturally occurring and man-made products may be organic. The common misconception that organic and natural have the same meaning, may cause the non-technical consumer to believe that a man-made organic material is natural when it is not.
- **Natural-Based.** 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 man-made pesticides or fertilizers.
- **Organic-Based.** 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 man-made pesticides or fertilizers.

It is important to understand that "natural" or "organic" products are not free from risk.

If any of the above terms are used by your lawn care professional, 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 (insect, weed or disease, etc.), requires state and EPA registration and is classified as a pesticide.)
- Are these materials man-made 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 are man-made materials!

Q. What is Integrated Pest Management, or 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 retained moisture levels 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 to enhance appearance by controlling incursions of undesirable grasses and weeds.
- Fertilization to provide essential nutrients that may be deficient in your lawn.
- The 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 pest presence.

Simply put, IPM is using the best mix of cultural techniques and discreet use of chemical products in a program of Integrated Pest Management. However, IPM definitions vary among those who use the term. Ask prospective lawn care services or landscapers 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 the lawn care company's visits is important to the success of the IPM care of your property.

Q. Who should I call if I have questions about the lawn care service or lawn products I have used?

A. If you have professional lawn care, contact the company that is caring for your lawn. 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 do not obtain satisfactory answers, contact the agency in your state that is responsible for regulating lawn care products and companies. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency also has a toll-free number for information on pesticides: (800) 858-7378.

NOTE: This information was reviewed with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency prior to its distribution. The EPA review of the materials is neither an approval nor an endorsement of the contents.

The Professional Lawncare Network

Based in metro-Atlanta, Georgia, and Herndon, Virginia PLANET develops and maintains active programs for approximately 4,000 member firms in the areas of business management, government affairs, public relations, technical assistance, safety and insurance, education, and inter-industry relations with other facets of the green industry.