Garden Chemicals: Safe Use & Disposal

Pesticides, such as insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides, are designed to be toxic to the pests they target.

When used properly, pesticides can protect your plants or home from damage. However, when the label instructions aren’t followed correctly, plant injury may occur, pests may not be controlled, human health may be impaired, and pesticides may contribute to soil, air, or water pollution. Fertilizer products may also have negative environmental impacts when they get into waterways.

Are pesticides necessary to control pests?

- Use pesticides only when nonchemical methods are ineffective and pests are reaching intolerable levels, then choose the least toxic, most effective product.
- Contact your local UC Master Gardener or Cooperative Extension office for help identifying your pest or an alternative pest control method.

If you must use garden chemicals:

- Select least toxic products that target your pest. Examples include bait stations, insecticidal soaps and oils, and microbial insecticides such as Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt).
- Buy ready-to-use products when possible, since they don’t have to be measured and mixed.
- Don’t water after applying garden chemicals unless the label tells you to. Never let pesticide or fertilizer run off into storm drains.
- Avoid applying chemicals outdoors when rain is forecast or when it is windy.
- Don’t apply pesticides or fertilizers on paved surfaces.

For help in an emergency, call the California Poison Control System at 1-800-222-1222. Visit calpoison.org for more information.

What you do in your home and landscape affects our water and health.

- Minimize the use of pesticides that pollute our waterways and harm human health.
- Use nonchemical alternatives or less toxic pesticide products whenever possible.
- Read product labels carefully and follow instructions on proper use, storage, and disposal.