

# HOME GROUNDS FACT SHEET



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## A Family Guide for Pesticide Use In and Outside the Home

*Pesticides can affect your family's health and your own if improperly selected and applied. They can also affect pets, plants, insects and the groundwater we all depend on. Although you may be using pesticides regularly, you may not be aware of these impacts.*

### What is a pesticide?

A pesticide is anything that kills a pest. Pesticides can be for weeds (herbicide), fungi (fungicide), mice (rodenticide), bacteria (bactericide/antibiotic) nematodes (nematicides) and insects (insecticide).

For the last 40 years, the main strategy for pest control has been the use of chemical pesticides as a preventative. In some areas, the overuse of these chemicals has created certain ecological and sociological problems.

People who practice integrated pest management (IPM) use pesticides as a **last resort**. They use them efficiently, safely, and only during the most critical times.

### What is Integrated Pest Management (IPM)?

IPM is a common sense approach for preventing and controlling pests. It incorporates plant selection and the improvement of plant health by using a variety of environmentally acceptable methods. IPM can involve the use of numerous pest management tactics to help protect plants against insects, mites, plant diseases, nematodes and weeds.

Think about going to the doctor. Your doctor uses a form of IPM on you. Information is gathered about history, signs and symptoms. Tests may be performed. Only after a diagnosis is made, are treatment options considered.

### When should a pesticide be considered?

The **first step** in pest control is observation and accurate identification of the problem. The **second step** is to evaluate the degree of damage. Some pests can be present without causing damage. The **third step** is to determine whether a mechanical, cultural and/or biological control would be effective.

Mechanical controls are usually barriers or traps. Cultural controls are modifications of horticultural practices such as watering times and amounts. Biological controls refer to the use of natural enemies to control pests.

The **last option** is to consider the use of the least toxic pesticide and only apply it to the plant with the problem, at the correct time in the life cycle of the pest.

### Who can apply pesticides?

Homeowners may only apply pesticides to their own principle residence. You may not apply pesticides to other properties you own, or as a favor to a neighbor or relative. You are required by law to follow the directions on the pesticide label. All the appropriate safety precautions that appear on the label should be heeded. For example, be sure to wear goggles, gloves and protective clothing.

The other option is to use a certified pesticide applicator who has received appropriate training and passed the necessary certification exams.

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### **Can my landscaper apply pesticides?**

Not necessarily. A professional landscape gardener or arborist may have only a home improvement license which allows them to cut lawns, prune trees and shrubs, and apply fertilizers and lime.

In order for a landscaper to apply pesticides to your property, he/she must work for a registered pesticide business. Triangular stickers are issued yearly by the Department of Environmental Conservation, and are displayed on all trucks of a registered pesticide business.

Before this professional applies a pesticide, they or their company must:

- ✓ have you sign a contract.
- ✓ provide you with copies of the pesticide labels for chemicals to be applied to your property. In addition, ask for a copy of the Materials Safety Data Sheet (MSDS).
- ✓ post the appropriate signage to your property.

While the law only requires one person from a registered pesticide business to be a certified pesticide applicator, insist in advance that the technician who does the work at your house, show you a pesticide applicator's card from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).

Keep kids and pets off treated areas just before, during and after treatment.

### **Storing Pesticides Safely**

Make sure you keep chemicals out of reach of children and pets. The less you have to store, the better. Buy only small quantities. Always keep them in locked cabinets with the label properly affixed. Storage temperatures should not go below freezing; dampness and sunlight are two other degraders of most chemicals.