

Follow Pesticide Labels

Several years ago, one of my responsibilities at a local garden center was to assist customers with pest and weed control issues. On one occasion, a gentleman brought in a container of product his wife had applied around the perimeter of her flowerbeds and along the border of her vegetable garden to keep the turfgrass and weeds out of those areas. The product prominently featured the statement “long term vegetation control” on its label. She had witnessed her father, a local farmer, use it on his ditch banks and in other areas, such as unpaved driveways. It worked well where her father had applied it, and so she did the same in her yard.

A few weeks after the initial application, she saw the desired effect of it killing a strip between the lawn and the flowerbeds and also the lawn and garden. The only problem was that the dead strip eventually reached two to three feet in width, killing many desired plants.

The product she had used is commonly referred to as a “soil sterilant” and can remain in the soil for many years. To mitigate the damage, her husband had to rent a backhoe and remove all the affected soil. In addition, he backfilled with new soil and installed new landscape plants. In the end, the inadvertent mistake cost the family several thousand of dollars.

I witnessed similar situations on several other occasions with similar results, with the common factor being that the user did not read and follow included label instructions correctly, as was the case in the above example. The particular product in the example was restricted use, meaning a special license is required to even apply it. Beyond this she did not read the label which stated the product was not for use in residential areas and additionally did not follow mixing instructions.

Another very frequently misapplied product includes lawn weed killer, where there are multiple brands available containing similar ingredients. Of the ingredients, 2,4-D, and Dicamba are especially common. Both, when used appropriately, are effective. However, they should not be used in hot weather or on windy days due to a tendency of lawn weed killer to volatilize into the air and drift towards desirable plants such as trees and shrubs. When this occurs, new branches often grow in a contorted fashion and leaves curl and grow in an otherwise deformed manner for several weeks to months. In sever situations, plant death can occur. For interesting pictures of herbicide damage, access the following website:

utahpests.usu.edu/.../landscape/articleID=8363. Products that contain Dicamba additionally should not be applied under the drip-lines of trees because Dicamba can remain in the soil for several weeks and possibly be absorbed by tree roots.

On a different note, Cache County USU Extension is offering free gardening classes on Tuesday evenings in the month of March. Topics covered include general vegetable gardening, fruit production, landscaping, turf care and others. For more information on this and other horticulture programs, go to www.extension.usu.edu/cache/horticulture or call 435-752-6263.