

Indian River County
1028 20th Place, Suite D, Vero Beach, Florida 32960
(772) 770-5030 Fax: (772) 770-5148 <http://indian.ifas.ufl.edu>

Applying Pesticides Safely

By: Janet Bargar, Water Quality Agent

A patch of grass in my front yard began to turn brown last month. At first I thought it was just an area that wasn't getting properly watered, but that wasn't the case after the irrigation system was tested. Then things got worse. The patch not only got bigger, but other brown spots began to pop up in the yard. Oh no, I think chinch bugs have found a home. This was confirmed through a visit to the extension office's Master Gardeners.

One way to get rid of them was to apply a pesticide. This may sound simple, but selecting the correct one can be a challenge with the large selection of pesticides available. By following a few guidelines, you can pick the best pesticide and be safe when working with it. The first step is to figure out the pest that is causing the problem. In my case, that was done. The next step is choosing the proper pesticide based on the pest. To ensure that the pests will be controlled and the environment will not be harmed, select the less toxic one because pesticides are not created equally. This information is found on the label along with:

- Directions for use
- Precautions
- What protective clothing to wear during application
- If special equipment is needed to apply it
- Hazards to the environment

Pesticides have been used for so long that we tend to forget that they can harm us when used improperly. By reading the label and following the directions, you can ensure safe application of pesticides. This is important because it is unlawful to use a pesticide in a manner that is not consistent with the label.

In addition to reading the label and following the directions, wear at least a long sleeved shirt, long pants, closed toed shoes, socks, and a wide brimmed hat when applying a pesticide. Any additional protective equipment, such as safety goggles or gloves, listed on the label should also be worn. Other safety measures are not eating, drinking, or smoking around pesticides. After finishing applying a pesticide, wash your hands, arms, and face with soap and water. In addition, wash protective clothing separate from other clothing and allow them to line dry because sunlight may break down any residual pesticides that may still remain on the clothes. These efforts will ensure that you will not contaminate your home and family.

In order to avoid having excess pesticide sitting around, only mix the amount you will use according to the label directions. It is unlawful to apply a pesticide at a higher dose than what is stated on the label. If you must store a pesticide, keep it in a safe, well ventilated, dry, and cool place where children and pets can't reach it.

Once a container has been emptied, do not reuse the container for anything. Properly dispose of it by triple rinsing it first. The steps in this simple process are:

- Fill the container one-third full with water.
- Cap the container securely and shake.
- Pour the rinse water into the spray tank.
- Repeat these steps at least two more times.

Do not pour pesticides or rinse water down a drain or on an area that could harm people, animals, or water, but you may apply the rinse water to a site listed on the pesticide label. The empty and rinsed container should then be wrapped in newspaper and thrown away in the garbage can. Another option that may be available in your community is a household hazardous waste collection program that allows you to dispose of old or unusable home and garden pesticides. Check with your local solid waste authority to find out if this is offered.

By identifying the pest, purchasing the correct pesticide, and following these guidelines, I'm happy to report that the chinch bugs have been suppressed in my yard. Now, if I could just do something about the weeds! For more information about pesticide safety, contact your local county extension service.