

Wally's Weekly News 29th NOVEMBER 2008
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DO'S AND DON'T'S IN GARDENING

I have been surprised this week about the number of gardeners that have called me in regards to problems they are having with potatoes, tomatoes, beans and roses.

Generally the problems have all been along the lines of distorted or unusual new growths on otherwise very healthy looking plants. The cause has in all cases been chemical herbicides such as Roundup type weed killers or lawn weed killers, resulting from spray drift or composting of lawn clippings that have residues of the weed killers still present. It only takes minute amounts of a number of chemical weed killers; and we are talking about parts per million, to have an effect on the most vulnerable plants such as roses, tomatoes, potatoes and beans.

These very small amounts of the chemicals can cause the plants to produce very unusual, distorted new growths and in many cases will overtime grow out of the effects unless the amount of the weed killer is sufficient to kill the plant completely. Other plants in the area including weeds will show no outward signs of a problem though you can bet in some way their growth is also affected.

One case I heard was the gardener had used Tordon on the lawn to kill the weeds and then composted the clippings. Later the now composted material was applied to the vegetable garden and beans when they germinated came up distorted, tomatoes soon showed similar problems.

You do not compost grass clippings for up to 6 months that have been treated with a weed killer.

The safe way for you to dispose of them is to a landfill or place under well established trees and shrubs where the residues will not harm these plants.

Green recycling places that take in organic material for recycling have no way of knowing if the pile of lawn clippings in a trailer contains herbicides or not. If they do contain weed killers then there maybe problems for the unsuspecting gardener that purchases the end result as compost.

Another area that happens at times is a farmer sprays a paddock for thistles or other weeds with a spray that does not kill the grasses. Later sheep or cattle are let into the paddock, their manure can be lethal to tomatoes and other vulnerable plants if used in gardeners.

If collecting say sheep manure from a farmer ask if they use herbicides.

There is a way of testing both compost from a recycling place or manure from a farm and that is simply placing a few bean seeds into the material and germinating them. If they come up neat and normal then the material is safe to use around sensitive plants.

Spray drift of herbicides is another big problem and many gardeners believe that the best time to spray a weed killer is on a calm day when there is no breeze. **WRONG**, this is one of the worst times to spray as small droplets of the spray are lifted up into the air on the conventional air currents and will float up to later drop somewhere, which maybe on your garden or someone else's.

The best time to spray a herbicide is when there is a mild breeze so that you can direct the spray away from the non target areas.

Even granulated weed killers that are applied dry and then watered down can possibly

cause problems as the moisture from the broken down granules can be lifted into the air to move to non target areas.

Another don't is never use any sprayer for both weed killers and other sprays.

The plastic in sprayers absorb some minute amounts of the herbicide which can be released later when spraying your roses or other plants. Have a sprayer that is clearly marked, Weed Killers Only.

I don't know how many times I have come across the problem of a weed killer contamination in a sprayer that later has wiped out a lot of plants in the garden. Even if you diligently wash out a sprayer used for weed killers it will still have residues at parts per million.

The ultimate safe way is to never use chemical weed killers but then you may have to do a lot more work keeping areas free of weeds. At the same time you cannot control what the people do next door or down the road. If you know that the people are using a weed killer some where near your home you can protect your vulnerable plants by spraying them with water to further dilute any residues.

A broadcasting sprinkler system for this is ideal. Run it for a short time every couple of hours that day till dusk.

In my books I give a number of safe methods of controlling weeds using common products such as salt and vinegar that will not cause any problems to non target plants.

The best time to control weeds is just after they have germinated, they are nice and small and very vulnerable to a sharp knife scrapping across the soil where they are growing.

If you want a good healthy soil structure do not pull out common weeds, instead slice them off with a sharp knife just below soil level and leave the foliage sitting on the top of the soil to naturally break down.

Don't walk on growing areas of gardens as this compacts the soil. Create walk ways so that you can tend growing areas.

Don't cultivate the soil which includes digging and rotary hoes. Instead cover areas with wet newspaper and purchased compost along with other goodies such as animal manures, sheep pellets and blood & bone then plant into this top level. (Some disturbance of the soil such as forking up potatoes will be needed but should be kept to a minimum.)

Watering: light watering with a hand held hose using a filter to remove chlorine from the water (if applicable) should be done daily unless it has rained. Regular light waterings to keep soil evenly moist is another key to successful gardening. Do not flood areas as this disrupts soil life but on the other hand never allow areas to dry out too much as that is as bad as flooding.

Watering is an art and once learned will make for great healthy gardens.

Watering by hand gives you time to relax and check plants for either disease or insect pest problems.

This means you can treat the small problem quickly before it becomes a big problem.

Don't waste your money on lots of man made fertilisers as these will not give you great gardens with healthy plants. Do use all natural fertilisers that will enhance the soil and plants such as dolomite, gypsum, animal manures, **Rok Solid (mineral dust) Ocean Solids (minerals from the seas) and Magic Botanic Liquid (MBL)**

The later when sprayed over the foliage of plants every couple of weeks will turn a so-so garden into a great garden.

Every week I have gardeners that contact me to say that they have adopted some or most

of my suggestions for gardening and that their gardens have never been so good. Its just common sense and not to be swayed into what has become to be known as conventional agriculture with its chemical concoctions. That form of gardening is outdated now, unsustainable and a heavy drag on your wallet. Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)