Pesticides

Pesticides are always a hot topic and can really begin some heated discussions. But what do you know about pesticides and how to use them correctly? In the state of North Carolina, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services serves as the pesticide regulatory agency. They decide what pesticides are safe for home use, distribute pesticide licenses for applicators, and inspect the licensed applicators to ensure compliance.

Pesticides for home use can be purchased in any garden supply or big box store. Some examples might include carbaryl, you might know it better by the trademarked brand name of Sevin, or glyphosate better known by most people as Round Up. These pesticides are considered safe for the average homeowner to use and apply without intensive training. When using any pesticide you must follow all of the instructions on the label. The label on the pesticide is the LAW. For most people, these readily available pesticides will meet your every insect and pest quelling need.

For the many people in Robeson County that own a farm, run a landscape business, or many of the other agriculture related jobs, there is likely a need for other pesticides. The state has decided that certain pesticides are considered ‘restricted use,’ or only licensed applicators can purchase and utilize them. A restricted use pesticide is classified as such because it requires more care when mixing, loading, and using the chemical. In order to be able to become a licensed pesticide applicator, a person must study for and pass a state administered exam. Once the person passes the exam, they must then pay for a license. Each license then requires continuing education hours over a specific period of time. For example, someone who has a commercial ornamental and turf license must take ten hours of continuing education credits over the next five years, but the license has to be renewed each year. This process is involved and lengthy for a reason. People who apply restricted use pesticides must be thoroughly educated to ensure the safety of themselves and those around them.

Once the applicators are licensed, the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services does not stop. They employ pesticide inspectors who follow up with the licensed applicators to make sure they are following the laws and regulations set forth. Sometimes they may even stop a landscaper to make sure he or she is properly licensed. The inspectors try hard to work with the licensed applicators and ensure compliance.
As an Extension Agent, I serve on the education end of all of this. I supply multitudes of continuing education opportunities for licensed pesticide applicators. I answer homeowner questions about insecticides and herbicides. I can find out the best pesticide option there may be to treat a particular insect or weed. But it all comes back to one main point,… “The Label is the Law!” Whether you are a licensed pesticide applicator or a homeowner, you must follow all the regulations set forth on the label of the pesticide.

As I said in the beginning, pesticides tend to be a touchy subject for many people. But sometimes it helps to know and understand the lengths at which pesticide applicators must go to ensure the safety of others. I am the first person to advocate the reduction of pesticide use in your home and garden, but until we can feed the world without the insects, weeds, and diseases taking over our crops we are reliant on pesticides in agriculture. The North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services does a great job regulating and controlling pesticide use. You can find more information about the NCDA&CS on their website at www.ncagr.gov.

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me, Kerrie Roach, horticultural Extension agent, at North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center, at (910) 671-3276 or by E-mail at Kerrie_Roach@ncsu.edu or visit North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center’s website at Robeson.ces.ncsu.edu.