

Non-Toxic Pesticides

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Tuesday, June 27, 2000

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URL: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/kron/archive/2000/06/27/pesticides.DTL>

San Francisco, CA, USA -- With the ant invasion in full force in parts of the Bay Area, homeowners are unleashing pesticides to try to beat back the pesky bugs. Most of them probably don't know there are non-toxic alternatives that work just as well. Contact4's Emerald Yeh reports.

This is a good time to talk about non-toxic pest control for several reasons: the ant invasion, summer gardeners are out doing their thing, and the government having just banned Dursban, which is the most widely used pesticide in U.S. households.

Dursban is an ingredient found in 800 products in our stores. Dursban is one of America's favorite bug killers, but the EPA says the chemical is a health risk to the brain, especially in growing children.

It can also harm our environment. According to Barton Brandenburg of the Central Contra Costa Sanitary District, "It only takes one drop of Dursban in 200,000 gallons to pollute that water." That means it kills the water fleas and other critters that provide food for fish.

That's why the Bay Area Clean Water Agencies are working with 80 local gardening and hardware stores to teach consumers about non-toxic products that are just as effective in getting rid of pests.

A special display area in the store features dozens of these alternatives, along with easy-to-read leaflets. Store employees are also trained to help customers get off the pesticide treadmill. "They would not think to use something else that's non-toxic just because they've never been exposed to it," says master gardener Ken Williams from the University of California Extension Program.

There are horticultural oil and hot pepper wax to combat aphids and orange peel spray to get rid of ants right away. For a more permanent solution, Williams suggests using "something like this ('Combat Quick Kill Formula'). The ants will take the bait and take it back to the nest, feed it to the queen and the rest of the ants, and it will actually kill off the entire nest."

For snails and slugs, put copper strips on plants and trees. "When their slimy little foot touches the copper, they'll get an electric charge and they turn around and go back," explains Williams. "This will last for years."

Try iron-phosphate based products if you want to actually kill the snails, but don't want to see their shells littered about.

The downside of some of the non-toxic products is they don't last as long as the toxic ones, so you have to apply them more often.

Williams says flowering plants are also great pest controllers. They attract the so-called beneficial insects that eat the pests. "For example...cosmos will bloom all summer long, gets beautiful flowers, quite prolific. It loves the heat. Alyssum...will also bloom all summer long and loves the heat as well." Same goes for rosemary, the California lilac, and sunflowers.

But if you're still thinking, 'Oh, what the heck. The little bit of pesticide I use won't make a difference,' think again. According to Barton Brandenburg, "When the Central Contra Costa Sanitary District did a test of the water coming into the treatment plant, they found that sixty-five percent of the toxic chemicals were coming from the residential areas. So we know that the little bit that each person uses does add up."

To find out which store near you is participating in the Less Toxic campaign, call 1-888-BAYWISE. For more information about non-toxic pest control, visit www.centrialsan.org.