

A Report on a Review of the Pesticide Use Policy of The Master Gardeners Association Of B.C.

This committee was asked by the Council to review our policy on pesticide use in the home garden after some members raised concerns about the direction we were taking. Members of the committee were Mel Felker, Liz Haan and Marguerite Miller.

In order to receive feedback from Master Gardeners we designed a questionnaire that was distributed at the Update Session. A summary of questionnaire results is included in this report. We also organized two workshops on pesticide use on June 5, 2003 that were moderated by Jack Grant, Master Gardener. Jane Stock, Executive Director of B.C. Landscape and Nursery Association and Marty McConnell, Master Gardener, presented at these workshops. Notes on the workshops, compiled by Jack Grant, are included in this report.

From the workshop and questionnaire feedback we received this committee recommends that our policy on pesticide use as stated in the Master Gardener Newsletter of March 1999 continue to be our policy. Entitled Master Gardeners Role in Promoting Plant Health, our policy states:

"The Master Gardeners Association of B.C. believes in a multifaceted approach to gardening problems and emphasizes the promotion of plant health, the use of environmentally responsible approach and the employment of integrated pest management (IPM). This statement reflects an underlying philosophy that we are stewards, not owners, of the land and that we should work with nature, not strive to control it.

Master Gardeners focus on a view of healthy, vigorous gardens taking into consideration environmental and cultural factors in addition to pests and diseases that affects plants. They promote the assessment of a garden's climatic conditions (rain, wind, temperature, light levels) and soil conditions (pH, texture, organic matter). They encourage the selection of plants, which are disease and pest resistant and whose needs match the prevailing garden conditions. They promote sound cultural practices in such areas as watering, fertilizing, pruning, and mulching.

When pests and/or diseases appear, Master Gardeners advocate the use of IPM which is defined as "a decision making process that uses a combination of techniques to suppress pests" and includes five important elements. These elements are:

1. Planning and managing the garden environment to prevent organisms from becoming pests;
2. Identifying potential pest problems;
3. Monitoring populations of pests and beneficial organisms, pest damage and environmental conditions;
4. Reducing pest populations to acceptable levels using strategies that may include a combination of biological, physical, cultural, mechanical, behavioral, and chemical controls;
5. Evaluating the effects and efficacy of treatments.

In keeping with these principles, Master Gardeners recommend methods to encourage the proliferation of beneficial organisms in the garden.

Master Gardeners may only consider the use of the least toxic chemicals after all non-chemical alternatives have been used. All clients seeking information about more toxic pesticides must speak to a licensed pesticide dispenser."

Therefore, in working with the community on problems in the home garden our policy should always be to use an environmentally responsible approach, emphasizing prevention and a combination of biological, physical, cultural, mechanical, and behavioral controls. Least toxic chemicals may be considered after the above alternatives have been used. Information about pesticides must be referred to a licensed pesticide dispenser.

When considering the use of least toxic chemicals we recommend that the list compiled by Dr. Linda Gilkeson through the B.C. Ministry of Land and Air Protection be the list of least toxic chemicals that Master Gardeners refer to. This list is well researched and can be updated by the author. A copy of the list is enclosed in the report.

Some Master Gardeners may want to update their knowledge about the use of IPM and least toxic chemicals, and we recommend that sessions be organized to do this. Information on this subject should be made available to all Master Gardeners in venues like the Update Session and individual workshops similar to the disease and insect I.D. workshops.

Also, we recommend that, because of our commitment to environmentally responsible gardening practices, our association should take an active role in promoting the restriction of pesticide use for cosmetic purposes in the home garden. In fact, it could be argued that we should be taking an active role in all environmental issues related to the home garden. However, that issue is beyond the scope of this report but should be dealt with when other issues arise.

In conclusion, it appears that the majority of Master Gardeners agrees with the above policy and uses these guidelines in their work with the community. However, it also appears that some Master Gardeners are not aware of this policy. We feel that it is important that association members are kept aware of our policies and their importance for the B.C. Association of Master Gardeners.