

News Article
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Pesticides – Read the Label

I once heard a farmer say, “For everything a farmer wants to grows, there is some kind of pest that wants to eat it or kill it. I believe kudzu would die of natural causes if we could only find a commercial value for it”. This statement rings pretty true for the vast majority of crops we attempt to grow. Each year farmers do battle with a wide range of pests in order to bring food and fiber to the consumer. Through the years farmers and university researchers have devised some cunning ways to control and manage crop damage. The first thing many of us might think of is pesticides, and there are certainly plenty to choose from. But farmers also use resistant plant varieties, biological control agents, cultural practices, crop rotation and sanitation, and even physical barriers. While all these practices are valuable and often very effective, there are times when the circumstances require a chemical pesticide. So let’s take a look at a few things someone should keep in mind when planning to use a pesticide, whether it be a farmer controlling a pest on cotton, or a homeowner wishing to control a pest in his/her rose garden.

First we need to realize that the word pesticide covers a lot of ground – so to speak. A pesticide used to control insects is called an insecticide, a pesticide used to control a fungus is called a fungicide, and the list goes on. Herbicides are used to control weeds, miticides kill mites, rodenticides kill rodents, nematicides control nematodes, bactericides control bacterial diseases, and there are others. The point here is that the word pesticide is a general term for all these products.

Each of these products may also have several names. The company that markets a product usually gives it a brand name such as “Roudup Herbicide”. This product has an active ingredient called glyphosate. It also has a chemical name, which would only make sense to a chemist. To complicate things further, the product may be registered for different uses and have different names depending on the use for which it is formulated. For example, “Roundup” has the same active ingredient (glyphosate) as “Rodeo”, which is formulated for aquatic uses, or “Accord” which is formulated for forestry uses. There are also generic versions of this product sold under different brand names. The important thing is to realize that all these products can have only one common name that is listed as the “active ingredient” under the Ingredients part of the product label, in this case glyphosate. So this is one of the first things to look at on a label.

For any and all pesticides, the Environmental Protection Agency requires a well documented product label that tells the pesticide’s active ingredient, toxicity, pests controlled, application rates, environmental concerns, health hazards, registration numbers, use restrictions, and much more. It is very important to read the label and understand all this information before using a pesticide.

Pesticides are ranked based on their toxicity, so the user understands the precautions needed when using the product. Every pesticide container must label the product with one of three signal words. “Caution” means the product is relatively low in toxicity. A signal word of “Warning” signifies a product that is moderately toxic and a signal word of “Danger” means the product is highly toxic and must be used very carefully. Regardless of the signal word, always read the label completely and carefully.

Some pesticides are marked as “Restricted Use”. These products are either highly toxic or they have some potential hazard to the environment or other important concerns. Only certified applicators can purchase and use these products. Individuals who wish to purchase or apply a restricted-use product on their own property for personal use must obtain a private “restricted-use” permit. This involves reading a pesticide safety study packet available from the County Extension Office and then passing a test. The test

and a \$25 application fee is then mailed to the Alabama Department of Agricultural and Industries. The person is then added to the list of permitted individuals and given a card with a permit identification number. The card must be shown to the pesticide dealer at the time of the purchase. The card is only valid for three years and then the process must be repeated to get another permit. Anyone who applies pesticides for hire must get a commercial pesticide permit that has an even more involved training and test requirement.

Any products or specific brands listed above do not constitute an endorsement by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System and are provided only as examples for topic discussion. For more information on pesticide use and safety contact County Extension Coordinator, Roger Vines at the Coosa County Extension Office at (256)377-4713.