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MORE IS NOT BETTER--THE LABEL IS THE LAW

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I remember as a kid my mom telling me “enough is as good as too much!.   She said this about many things, and although we didn’t talk about pesticides, it certainly applies to them.  Any product used to control (or kill) pests is classified as a pesticide, including herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, rodenticides, algaecides and more.  The label of any pesticide must be followed-it is actually the law.

These products are tested extensively and the label recommends the most effective method and amount to use.  Using more or less than recommended will likely not be as effective.  For example, glyphosate (the active ingredient in Roundup, Ranger, Rodeo, Touchdown and other products) is a commonly used herbicide that is frequently not applied according to label directions, leading to poor results.

Glyphosate is systemic (it gets into the plant’s vascular system and kills it, roots and all) and non-selective (kills most any plant it contacts).  Thinking they will get better kill of the weeds, people often use more than what the label says.  It does result in a quick kill of the above ground parts, but then the herbicide can’t be moved down into the roots—defeating the purpose of using a systemic herbicide, and the weed often regrows.

This herbicide is supposed to be slow acting because it takes time for it to move throughout the plant and down to the roots.  It should take about two weeks for a weed sprayed with glyphosate to die, although yellowing of the leaves should be visible a couple days after spraying.  In general, herbicides are more effective when weeds are actively growing, so make your application accordingly, even if it means watering them a few days before spraying.

Read over the whole pesticide label and you will find a great deal of useful and important information.  It not only tells what pest it controls, but where it can be applied, how much to use and how to dispose of the container properly.  Other very important information is how it affects bees, fish and other wildlife.  If it is harmful to bees, for example, it will say when to apply (or not apply) it.  Depending on the pesticide, it might say to spray only late in the day when bees are not very active and have returned to their hives, or not to spray it at all when the plant is blooming.

Other crucial information on the label is listed under PPE (Personal Protective Equipment), which is what the applicator needs to wear to for their safety while applying the pesticide.  Every product requires wearing rubber gloves when mixing, and usually long pants, shoes or boots and shirt with long sleeves when applying.  Be sure to read and follow what is listed for the product that you are using.

The label of every pesticide, as well as all household cleaning products for that matter, contains a signal word which describes the short-term toxicity of the product.   The words are Caution, Warning and Danger.  Caution means the product is slightly toxic if eaten, absorbed through the skin, or inhaled, or that it causes slight eye or skin irritation.  Warning indicates the product is moderately toxic, or causes moderate eye or skin irritation.  Danger means that the pesticide product is highly toxic by at least one route of exposure. It may be corrosive, causing irreversible damage to the skin or eyes.  Any product with a Danger label should be used with extreme caution.  Labels also tell what first aid measures should be taken if needed. When using any potentially toxic product, it is a good idea to have the National Poison Control Center phone number handy, it is 1-800-222-1222.

Some additional guidelines to keep to for safe and effective use of pesticides follow.  Before purchasing, read the label to make sure it’s the right product for the job.  Buy the right amount for your needs and pass the rest (in the original container) on to someone else who can use it. Some products lose their effectiveness if stored for long periods of time.

Whenever using any type of pesticide, remember it is definitely NOT true that “if some is good, more is better”.  “More” can sometimes cause harm to people, animals, plants or the environment; and at best is a waste of money.   Be sure to always read the whole label (yes, even that little bitty print) and follow what it says.  You’ll get better results, save money, and will be following the law.