Pesticides

November 19,2021

A common problem I deal with is the misuse of pesticides. This comes with a lot of different twists. The most common one is the chemical a person is using doesn’t work on the problem. Numerous times I have had people tell me they applied bug killer to a disease problem or a weed killer to a bug problem. Just because it is a pesticide doesn’t mean it works on all pests. I have even known of people that have treated problems with gasoline or diesel fuel because they did not want to use a chemical “poison”. In this situation, they used a far more poisonous and environmentally devastating product.

The key to using a pesticide is knowing what is the exact problem. This means knowing the name of the bug, disease, weed, or even if the problem is caused by one of them or is related to something entirely different. Some of the cases I have seen include people that have killed the purple bug that was eating their plant. In reality, they killed the larva of a lady beetle that was eating away at the insects that were doing minor plant damage. Many times, it is simply using the wrong product or at the wrong time.

One classic example is spraying a fungicide after the rain instead of before. Most products that we have for the disease are preventative. They stop the disease before it starts, they do not cure it. It is during the rain that the disease infection occurs. Putting a fungicide on before a rain when it can protect the plant, is the proper use. Most people rightly point out that the rain will wash it off. Yes, it will and you will need to reapply before the next rain.

Spraying at the wrong insecticide on a bug is very common. The use of the wrong chemical can actually kill off its natural predators. Leaving the pest more freedom to reproduce. Many insects have become resistant to chemicals. A good example is the Colorado Potato Beetle. The insecticide carbaryl, sold under various brand names, will list the Colorado Potato beetle as an insect it will control. That was true at one time, but today there are a lot of genetic strains of this bug, resistant to this insecticide.

Spraying the wrong time of year is another consideration. Dandelions are more easily killed in the fall. Spraying a weed when it reached maturity or may have already gone to seed is a waste of money and resources.

I find people that use a pesticide at the wrong time in the pest's life cycle. Insects in the egg stage are more tolerant of insecticides. Spraying eggs is a waste. Putting a crabgrass preventer (pre-emergent) on after it has germinated does not affect the weed.

Then there is the mole control product that is available at hardware’s called poison peanuts. Moles do not eat peanuts. They are insectivores. They eat insects. They experimented, by putting moles in a cage with these peanuts and they choose to starve.

The list goes on and on. This is why my office is here to help you sort out the answers. We are located at the fairgrounds in Rochester and our phone number is 574-223-3397.

One more thing that I see happening with pesticides is buying too much. Sometimes we only need a little bit to do the job but it comes in a large container and so a lot is left over and now we need to store it or dispose of it. The good news for our community is we now have a household hazardous waste facility at the Fulton County Solid Waste District that can take those leftover pesticides. All of us have some, many are old and even found in glass containers sitting in the garage. This is a great asset to our community and I hope you will take advantage of the service.

Mark Kepler, Extension Educator- Agriculture and Natural Resources