

National Coalition for Pesticide-Free Lawns

Supporting healthy lawns and landscapes without the use of pesticides
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GRASSROOTS NEWS

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We are making progress with Home Depot. Emails and letters are still being delivered and the company's headquarters has responded. We have been asked to provide explicit, concrete proposals of each change we want to see before a meeting will be arranged (as opposed to sitting down with us to discuss the possibilities of the specific issues we have already laid out). The response can be read many ways. Regardless, we are capitalizing on the opportunity and are developing proposals with Coalition members in the East and West. If you would like to be more involved, just let us know.

ACTION OF THE MONTH: Declare Your Own Pesticide-Free Zone

Did you know that the pesticide-free zone (PFZ) ladybug sign is the Coalition's symbol to signify the national movement? Imagine it - in town after town across the country PFZ signs popping up everywhere - in parks, in front of businesses, hospitals, schools, playgrounds, town halls, and of course, on people's lawns. This was the vision when the Coalition chose the sign as its symbol.

In hopes that you will share that vision, Beyond Pesticides is offering the PFZ sign to Coalition members at cost. For \$6.50 you will get the sign and an Owners Manual - a brief guide with tips on how to post the sign, talking to your neighbors about pesticides, and more. No matter where they are placed, the signs are great educational tools and conversation pieces. Give them as holiday gifts or just get one for yourself. Organizations can also put their sticker on the backside. The aluminum enameled sign is 8" in diameter and will not rust or fade.



Declare your yard or property a Pesticide-Free Zone. (Also available in Spanish.) Order by phone at (202) 543-5450 or by email: info@beyondpesticides.org.

TIPS FROM THE FIELD: Fall Leaf-Cycling

Fall, as the name implies, results in leaves on the lawn. The main job this time of year is to keep those leaves from smothering the lawn and creating thin spots where weeds will invade.

Leaf-cycling is a great method of natural fertilization of your lawn. According to some accounts, the leaves of one large shade tree can save you up to \$15 worth of plant food and humus. Leaves can also contain as many minerals as manure. Even common pine needles will add calcium, magnesium, nitrogen and phosphorus, plus other trace elements to the soil.

There are several ways to get those leaves working for you. One is by shredding the leaves and leaving them distributed on the lawn. Or you may choose to create a leaf compost.

The easiest way to shred leaves is by using a mulching mower or shredder. The mulcher will chop the leaves into tiny bits that will quickly decompose and get recycled back into the soil. Leaving the chopped leaves on the soil is the easiest way to recycle and nourish. It is best done when the leaves are dry and before too many accumulate. If this is unavoidable, mow over the area a second time to allow further fragmentation and distribution of the leaf litter. Collect any left over wet or excessive clumps of leaves and place in a compost.

If you don't have a mulcher, or even if you do but want to create a compost, use a lawn sweeper or the old tried and true method of hand raking. Leaf blowers create noise and air pollution and can damage plants with their forceful winds and spread insect eggs, weed seeds and disease spores.

Once your children are done jumping in the mound of leaves, put them back into a heap. If you shred the leaves before putting them in the compost they will break down much faster over the winter. Mow over the pile with your mower until the leaves are shredded. It doesn't take long. A leaf-mulching attachment for rotaries can also be used.

To make compost, alternate layers of four parts leaf litter with one part manure, biodegradable garbage (egg shells, kitchen scraps, coffee grinds, etc.), green weeds, grass clippings, old vines from the garden or other nitrogen-rich supplements.

Turn the pile once every three weeks and voilà! You have topdressing for your natural lawn (and rich soil for the garden) by Spring. For more information on creating a compost visit <http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/Organics/Gardening/> or call Mr. Zien.

To ensure robust growth later, apply one last application of a slow release, organic fertilizer to help decompose the leaf detritus and give it a great head start for next Spring.

Before you put the mower away for the rest of the season, do not forget to sharpen the blades so it is all ready to go when you need it in the Spring. Dull blades can tear the grass and leave a jagged edge that invites pest attacks.

Steven M. Zien is executive director of Biological Urban Gardening Services (BUGS) and a member of the Coalition's Advisory Board. Visit BUGS at <http://www.organiclandscape.com>.

WHAT'S NEWS?

New Report Promotes Pesticide-Free Parks

(*Beyond Pesticides*, November 11, 2005) A new report by the Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides (NCAP) shows the many reasons why pesticide-free parks benefit communities.

"Pesticide-free parks can be important models for the rest of the community," said Megan Kemple, NCAP's pesticide-free parks coordinator. "They demonstrate to families and businesses how to manage pest problems in a way that is healthy for both people and the environment."

The report, *Pesticide-free Parks: It's Time!*, summarizes the hazards of pesticides and offers simple advice for communities.

With 14 pesticide-free parks in Seattle, Washington, three in Portland and 45 in Salem, Oregon, Northwestern states may be leading the country.

For a copy of the report, contact NCAP at (541) 344-5044 or visit www.pesticide.org/pfpreport.pdf.

Seattle Schools Pass Strong Pesticide Policy

(*Beyond Pesticides*, November 2, 2005) The Seattle School Board unanimously adopted a district-wide policy to eliminate the use of the most toxic pesticides in schools.

"We have embraced the concept of healthy learning environments through a strong policy preventing possible exposure to toxic chemicals such as pesticides," said Board President Dr. Butler-Wall.

The new policy, drafted by an advisory committee of district staff members, parents, and doctors, prohibits the use of pesticides linked to cancer, nervous system damage, and other health risks.

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