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Staying Busy and Eating Healthy while Social Distancing

Let me cut to the chase: I'm trying to stay sane while self-isolating. Can Beyond Pesticides provide some ideas for projects I can work on that conform with social distancing?

Lynn, Arlington, VA

These are incredibly trying times for people across the country, and the staff and Board of Beyond Pesticides' hearts go out to all whose health has been affected by the coronavirus. While some areas are starting to re-open, Beyond Pesticides urges extreme caution by social distancing, wearing a mask, and utilizing safe disinfecting and sanitizing practices. (See p12, *The Intersection of Pesticides and the New Normal under Coronavirus*.) As we isolate from family and friends, the good news is that there is still plenty we can do to forward the goal of a safer, healthier, pesticide-free world. Here are some actions you can still take:

Grow a Victory Over the Virus Garden: Eating healthy food is an important part of feeling and staying well during self-isolation. And pollinators and other imperiled wildlife are still in need of our protection. Whether you decide to grow vegetables to eat or flowers for pollinators, you'll want to make sure that your seeds and plants are free from harmful pesticides. Beyond Pesticides maintains a directory of online retailers where you can find high quality organic seeds for your garden, so you won't need to break quarantine (www.bp-dc.org/lorganicseeds).

Support Your Local, Organic Farmers: Many farmers are struggling economically from the coronavirus outbreak. These farms are likely to face significant disruptions when they or one of their employees get sick. Connect online with local farmers and see if they have moved to curbside pickup or other direct-to-consumer "no touch" distribution channels that minimize interaction.

Write to Your Elected Officials: Remember that letter you started to your elected officials, but never sent? Now you have time to finish and send it. Take your time in conducting background research; make use of Beyond Pesticides' databases on peer-reviewed studies such as the *Pesticide-Induced*

Diseases Database (www.bp-dc.org/pesticide-induceddiseases) or *What the Science Shows* on pollinator declines (www.bp-dc.org/pollinators).

Organize Virtually: Pesticide-free and organic practices remain a critically important part of our future, as they help create more resilient people, communities, and ecosystems. You can still connect with your neighbors through social media on sites like Facebook and Nextdoor. Virtual tools like Zoom let you continue face-to-face organizing. You can work with like-minded advocates to map out a post-pandemic game plan for action.

Stay Up-to-Date with Beyond Pesticides: Our email (info@beyondpesticides.org) and phone line is open (202-543-5450), and we'll continue working remotely to engage with members and supporters on actions and online events.

Toxic Chemicals Aren't Necessary to Control Coronavirus

I have underlying health conditions and am looking for advice on least-toxic measures I can take around my home to stop coronavirus. I read that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is recommending some highly toxic products—is that the only thing that will work?

Paula, Silver Spring, MD

While people are seeking answers, EPA has indeed published a list of products that are highly toxic, containing toxic chemicals such as chlorine bleach, peroxyacetic acid, alkyl dimethyl benzyl ammonium chlorides, didecyl dimethyl ammonium chloride and other "quats," sodium dichloro-s-triazinetrione, and hydrochloric acid. Some of these can trigger breathing problems and other respiratory symptoms, as well as attack the nervous and immune systems.

On the other hand, CDC's website makes it clear that such toxic chemicals are unnecessary. The common sense, nontoxic advice should be heeded:

- Avoid close contact with people who are not isolating with you.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

SHARE WITH US!

Beyond Pesticides welcomes your questions, comments, and concerns. Have something you'd like to share or ask us? We'd like to know! If we think something might be particularly useful for others, we will print your comments in this section. Mail will be edited for length and clarity, and we will not publish your contact information. There are many ways you can contact us: Send us an email at info@beyondpesticides.org, give us a call at 202-543-5450, or send questions and comments to: 701 E Street SE, Washington, DC 20003.

- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a soap-based household cleaning spray or disinfectant wipes.*
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.*
- For cleaning hard surfaces, 70% alcohol (common rubbing alcohol) is sufficient.*

* See www.bp-dc.org/disinfectants for safer products. Stay safe during this crisis.

Addressing Invasives while Protecting Health and Ecosystems

I'm working on a pesticide policy in my community and am interested in how you might suggest we deal with "invasive" species. Can you point us in the right direction?

Martin, Boston, MA

It's Beyond Pesticides position that invasives, or opportunistic species, should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, with established priorities and a plan. With any unwanted species, there needs to be an understanding of the ecological context. We need to be asking the right questions: What role is the plant currently playing in a landscape—what niche is it currently filling? If we remove this plant, what will fill that niche? Will we be replanting the right native species to fill that niche? What are the detrimental impacts of letting it spread? Is there a way we can isolate it to stop its spread? Can we ever remove this plant altogether, or will we be working at control indefinitely? These are important questions that we need to be asking before we even consider management methods.

Regarding policy, requiring an individualized invasive species management plan seems to be the right answer, though unfortunately many pesticide reform policies sidestep the issue and simply exempt invasives to avoid opposition. Just like all organic approaches, we'll want to place a focus on prevention and working with ecological systems, rather than against them, making even least-toxic pesticide use a last resort.

There is a strong potential to undermine the stability of an ecosystem if we simply go in and immediately break out the strongest tools in the toolbox without a plant replacement strategy. On a turf system with common weeds a simple answer is grass plants. But, in forested areas already subject to intrusion (from construction/logging, etc.), rights-of-way, and urban areas, the focus is on alternative vegetation or ground cover. Sometimes, little should be done except simple mechanical cutting to keep these species in balance.

This is an interesting and, at times, contentious issue that environmentalists grapple with, so there is certainly room for

fresh ideas on how to approach opportunistic species without the use of toxic pesticides.

For more information, we encourage you to watch the talk given at Beyond Pesticides 37th National Pesticide Forum in New York City by Peter Del Tredici, PhD, senior research scientist at Harvard's Arnold Arboretum (www.bp-dc.org/invasives).

FROM THE WEB

Beyond Pesticides' Daily News Blog features a post each weekday on the health and environmental hazards of pesticides, pesticide regulation and policy, pesticide alternatives and cutting-edge science, www.beyondpesticides.org/dailynewsblog. Want to get in on the conversation? "Like" us on Facebook, or "Follow" us on Twitter! www.facebook.org/beyondpesticides, twitter.com/bpncamp.

Excerpt from Beyond Pesticides Action of the Week (1/27/2020): Insist that the Veterans Administration Cover Conditions Caused by Agent Orange. United States military veterans suffering from bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, hypertension, and Parkinson's-like symptoms after their exposure to Agent Orange will remain unprotected and uncompensated until at least late 2020, according to a letter sent by Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Robert Wilkie to U.S. Senator Jon Tester (D-MT).

Michael comments: Why so long with a decision when the VA promised a few years ago that they would announce their decision? It used to be that the VA had 90 days after the National Academy of Science findings to make a decision. Prolonging this is not the right way to treat our veterans.

Excerpt from Beyond Pesticides Action of the Week (1/21/2020): Send a Message to EPA: Do Your Job to Protect Health and the Environment. As news reports come in demonstrating the threats to major groups of organisms, such as insects and birds, and the stability of Earth's ecosystems, and scientists appeal for major policy changes, recent actions by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Science Advisory Board highlight the need for public insistence that EPA do its job.

Alice comments: EPA Administrator Wheeler must do his job and work as supported by the best scientific evidence available.

C.E. comments: EPA continues to fail to do their only job, which is to protect people and the environment. My life has been ruined by that failure and many people are suffering terribly (not to mention the increased suffering if we don't fix this right now). Everyone has a right to be safe and protected. Humans, animals, plants, water, and the environment should be protected with the utmost care. We demand that EPA protect the environment instead of the pesticide and chemical industries. If not, resign and have someone that is capable do the job!