

# Pesticide

# info

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT PESTICIDES



## California Department of Pesticide Regulation

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## How to have a healthy lawn, healthy environment

Your lawn is only a small piece of California land but taken together, our lawns cover a lot of ground. That means your lawn care activities, with everyone else's, make a difference to the environment. What you do can protect our waterways from pesticide and fertilizer runoff.

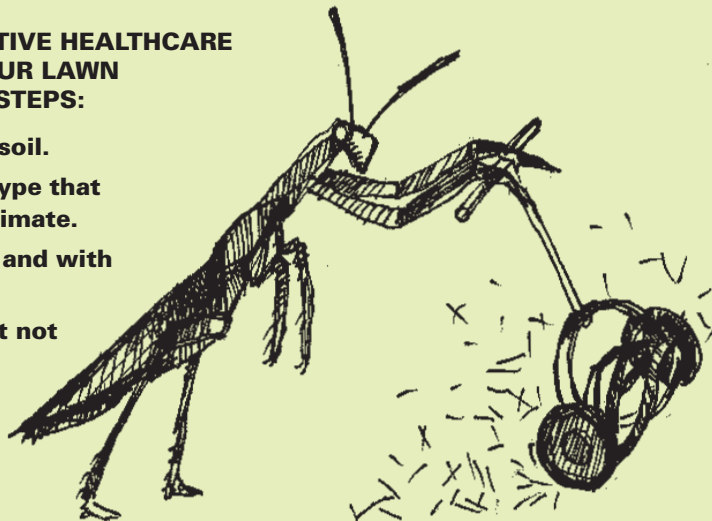
You don't have to be an expert to have a healthy lawn. Think about lawn care like the preventive program you use for your own health. The goal is to prevent problems so you don't have to treat them. The health secret for lawns is to create conditions your grass needs to thrive so it can out-compete weeds, disease and insect pests. It means setting practical goals, whether you or a professional service will be doing the work. Proper planning and

care can reduce or eliminate your need for pesticides, including herbicides and weed-and-feed products. If you do choose to use pesticides, follow label directions exactly.

**Choose the right grass for your climate.** For example, if you live in a hot, desert climate, plant a grass that doesn't mind heat and drought. If you intend the lawn to be a kids' play area, plant a variety that can take a beating. Find out what grasses suit you best from your local University of California (UC) Cooperative Extension office. Get the number in the county white pages in the front of your phone directory. Or download UC's *Turfgrass Selection for the Home Landscape* (Publication #8035) from <http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu>.

### ADOPT A PREVENTIVE HEALTHCARE PROGRAM FOR YOUR LAWN BY TAKING THESE STEPS:

- **Develop healthy soil.**
- **Choose a grass type that thrives in your climate.**
- **Mow high, often and with sharp blades.**
- **Water deeply, but not too often.**
- **Correct thatch buildup.**
- **Set realistic goals.**



**What you put on your lawn can have a bigger impact than you might think. Taking care of the environment begins in our own backyards. (And front yards.)**



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**Keep sharp.** Make sure your mower blades are sharp. Dull blades wound the grass and make it more vulnerable to pests and diseases.

**Longer is better.** Grass needs leaf surface to take in sunlight. This enables it to grow thicker and develop deeper roots, which in turn helps it retain water better, tolerate insect damage, and fend off diseases. Longer, thicker grass also makes it difficult for weeds to grow. No single mowing height is best for all turf. To find out what's best for your lawn, get advice from your UC Cooperative Extension office or check *Mowing Your Lawn* (#8006), a free download at <http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu>.

**One-third rule.** Set your mower so it removes no more than one-third the length of the grass blades at any one time. If your lawn has gotten too long to do that, reduce the length in stages, mowing more often, following the one-third rule.

**Be mellow.** Decide how many weeds you can tolerate. It isn't practical to expect a weed-free lawn. Dig up weeds by hand and sprinkle grass seed on bare spots so weeds can't fill in. Water regularly with a fine spray until the grass sprouts. Over-seed your lawn each fall by spreading seeds on top. A thick lawn helps crowd out weeds.

**Irrigate efficiently.** It is time to water when footprints stay compressed for more than a few seconds. Deeper, less frequent irrigations are best for most lawns - they promote deep root growth. (Desert areas, slopes, or areas with shallow soils usually need several, shorter watering times.) Irrigate slowly so water doesn't run off. Over-watering can wash pesticides and fertilizers into the storm drains and contaminate our waterways. Learn how to adjust your sprinklers so you water more during dry spells and less (or not at all) in the rainy season. To find out the best watering schedule for your area and grass, download UC's *Lawn Watering Guide for California* (#8044), <http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu>.

**Correct thatch buildup.** Thatch is a compacted layer of dead plant materials between the grass blades and the soil surface. It can attract harmful insects. Thatch deeper than 3/4-inch can stop water and nutrients from getting to the roots. Remove thatch by gently raking your lawn in late spring or early summer. To prevent thatch, don't overwater or overfertilize.

**Let your lawn breathe.** Once a year, aerate your lawn by removing small plugs of earth. This allows air and water to aerate the grass roots. You can have this done professionally or rent tools to do the job yourself.

**Grasscycle.** Grass clippings can provide most nutrients needed by a lawn if the clippings are small enough to decay quickly without forming mats on top of the living grass. With frequent mowing, you will have short clippings that will not cover the grass surface, and will quickly decay. Consider buying a mulching lawn mower. It cuts grass clippings finer and blows them into the lawn.

**Develop healthy soil.** To break down clippings, soil must be biologically active with bacteria, fungi, insects, worms, and oxygen. Soil under a lawn that has been heavily fertilized or often treated with herbicides and insecticides may be deficient in these elements.

Make sure your soil has the right pH balance, key nutrients, and good texture. You can buy an easy-to-use soil analysis kit at hardware stores or contact your UC Cooperative Extension office for a soil analysis. This will help you find the right mix of fertilizer for your soil. A slow-release fertilizer that feeds the lawn slowly is best.

**Use pesticides sparingly, if at all.** Healthy lawns should resist most pest problems. If you have to use pesticides, make sure you know what pest you are dealing with and pick the least-toxic product best suited to the problem. Read the label before you buy the product and again before you use it - then follow the instructions exactly.

**Know your friends.** Think of your lawn as a small piece of nature where pests have their place. Often, nature provides its own pest control in the form of birds, beneficial insects and other organisms that help keep pests under control. Consider natural alternatives—for example, pulling weeds—before using pesticides because pesticides may kill your helpers.

**Pesticide Complaint ?**

**1-87PestLine**  
INFORMATION LINE

1-877-378-5463

