

Five Alternatives to Pesticides



[Resources](#) > [Do It Yourself Projects](#) > [At Home](#)

Activity

July 1, 2008

By Stephanie Bonner



Spring has sprung, and along with the flowers in our gardens and buds on the trees can also come weeds through pavement cracks and mischievous insects that may dampen spring excitement. I know what you're thinking. Drop the can of pesticide. In fact, why not retire it entirely? We've got five great ways to keep your garden pesticide free and looking gorgeous. But before you toss it, make sure to contact your city to find out how to properly dispose of hazardous waste. Alright, let's get our hands dirty!

1. **Wake-up Call**

Did you know that coffee grounds are an all-natural way to provide soil with the nitrogen needed to fertilize flowers, grass and even vegetables? Even if you don't drink coffee at home, Starbucks franchises have started saving their coffee grounds ([Grounds for Your Gardens](#)) in an effort to be environmentally responsible. You can mix it in with your compost or right into your garden soil

2. **Not-so-sluggish Solution**

Do you find your beautiful hostas tend to look a little more beat up than bountiful by mid-summer? This year, try mixing a solution of equal parts water to vinegar and spray this solution around the plants when they are starting to shoot out, before the leaves open. If you do this for four to five days, you should be [slug free](#) for the summer

3. **Heat Wave**

When you work hard to keep your property presentable, it can be tempting to buy products that zap weeds fast. Unfortunately, the harm these products do to the ground water, helpful insects and the environment is a large price to pay. This year, try the free AND easy option: pour boiling water on troublesome weeds. To increase the effectiveness of this method, trim the weed down, pour a little salt on top of the weed and then add boiling water. This will kill and dry up your weed for good

4. **Get Some Air**


Looking for a lush, healthy lawn that will be the envy of all your neighbours? This year, try [aerating](#) your lawn in spring and fall to maximize oxygen intake and rejuvenate your grass. Think of it as an exfoliation treatment for your property! Usually, local landscapers or garden centres will offer this service, but they also rent out equipment to take care of the job.

5. **Biodiversify Your Garden**

2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity. Celebrate it in your garden by planting a wide range of native species. In doing so, you will be increasing the variety of helpful critters that will work to eliminate the harmful ones. And what more could you ask for than not having to lift a finger? We've got all the tools you need to create your perfect garden, whether you are working with shade, in dry or wet conditions or gardening for wildlife. Check out CWF's [demonstration gardens](#) for helpful ideas!



Banish Unwanted Weeds and Bugs

 [Resources](#) >> [Habitat Projects](#) > [Map Your Backyard](#)

Background

Make your backyard habitat a healthier place for wildlife. Use safe alternatives to chemical pesticides.

Procedure

- Pull unwelcome weeds like dandelions and thistles instead of blasting them - and other wildlife - with chemical herbicide. You'll find excellent books about natural pest control alternatives at most libraries.
- Pluck infested leaves by hand to help control pests like birch leaf miners and leaf rollers.
- In late fall or early spring, prune branches containing the greyish egg bands of tent caterpillars. Scrape egg bands off limbs too large to prune. If they've already hatched, pick off the larvae when they gather in their nests at night or on cool days.
- Blast insects out of trees and shrubs using a garden hose. This method works especially well on aphids, spider mites, and pear and cherry slugworms.
- Plant marigolds, garlic, chrysanthemums, chives, onions, basil, savoury, or mint amongst your backyard plants. Their natural odours and root secretions smell revolting to some insects.
- Attract hungry insectivores, such as bats, warblers, and predatory insects, using one of our projects, such as "[Build a Bat House](#)".
- Brew your own insect control by mixing 100 ml of crushed hot peppers with 400 ml of water. Strain the concoction and spray it on affected plants. Be careful: Peppers can burn skin and eyes.
- Remember: Nature often provides its own pest control in the form of birds and insects that devour the species we consider nuisances.
- Know a friend from a foe. For instance, the ladybird beetle larva looks threatening but is an important ally with a voracious appetite for aphids.





The Dirt on Neonics



News & Media > Articles

Story

May 11, 2017

By Heather Robison

It's gardening season. You can't wait to dig in and help create a welcoming environment for wildlife. But please, be careful. Many seeds and bedding plants have been pre-treated with neonics, which are chemicals derived from nicotine. There are nine different kinds of these products currently in use in Canada, all with complicated names and harmful side effects for butterflies, earthworms, aquatic invertebrates, birds and, most notably, bees.

Bee Serious

In the 1990s, neonicotinoid pesticides were introduced because many insects were becoming resistant to common pesticides.

While they were originally thought to be safer than other chemicals, neonics are derived from nicotine, which is a neurotoxin and impacts brain function. Neonics are also systemic, which means they are absorbed by plants when applied to seeds, soil or leaves. The chemicals circulate through the plant's tissues, killing the insects that feed on them. Many of the plants available at garden centres have been pre-treated with neonics. Many of the seeds that farmers plant are pre-treated as well. The chemicals spread through dust generated during drilling of treated seeds, contamination and accumulation in soils, runoff into waterways, and uptake by non-target plants through their roots or dust on leaves.



While most of the buzz in the news is currently focused on protecting bee populations, the impacts of neonics are widespread

Bee Warned

While most of the buzz in the news is currently focused on protecting bee populations, the impacts of neonics are widespread. Imidacloprid is one of the most widely used pesticides and has been found in aquatic environments in Canada at concentrations of up to 290 times the acceptable level for aquatic invertebrates. This is very concerning. The pesticide seeps into streams and lakes from farmer's fields and kills aquatic insects, many of which are a very important food source for fish as well as birds once they hatch into flying adults. Thankfully, Health Canada has proposed a ban on the use of this chemical, which is the appropriate decision given the evidence of harm.

Bee Strong

Health Canada is launching special reviews of two other neonics (clothianidin and thiamethoxam). These pesticides have become infamous for impacting pollinators around the world. But the Canadian Wildlife Federation would like to see Health Canada do more to protect our biodiversity from neonicotinoid pesticides. The effects of these toxins are acute and chronic. There is solid scientific evidence of serious harm to wild bees, hoverflies, butterflies, lacewings, flower bugs and earthworms. There is also some evidence of harm to vertebrates such as birds and bats.

We encourage Health Canada to implement a legislated ban on the use of all neonicotinoids as seed treatment. We also recommend a ban on all forms of neonicotinoid pesticides for insect-pollinated crops such as apples, tomatoes and blueberries. Neonicotinoids should only be used on crops that are wind-pollinated (like corn) or self-pollinated (like wheat and soy) in cases of severe pest outbreak conditions and in the absence of alternative pesticides with less harmful impacts on wildlife and freshwater ecosystems.

Bee Part of the Solution

CWF been raising awareness of the dangers of pesticide use since it was founded in 1962. At that time, we urged governments to impose regulations on the sale of pesticides to reduce threats to wildlife.

In 1972, Canada banned the use of a particularly harmful pesticide called DDT which caused the thinning of eggshells in birds of prey such as the Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon. Unfortunately, this pesticide persisted in the environment for many years and continued to cause impacts well after the ban. In the early 1980s, the Bald Eagle population of Southern Ontario was nearly wiped out by impacts of DDT and other industrial chemicals such as PCBs. CWF was part of successful efforts to help save the species.

CWF is now campaigning against the use of neonics. We also want to ensure that farmers are supported throughout the banning process. We believe that agricultural departments across Canada should support our famers by ensuring there are safer alternative options and that farmers receive training in integrated pest management. This is designed to reduce use of pesticides by scouting for crop pests in the field before any spraying happens and ensuring that beneficial pest predators are supported in farm fields.

[Donate now to support CWF's efforts to ban neonics.](#) Look for gardening items that CWF has certified wildlife friendly, such as our pollinator plant kits. What else can you do?

- *Bee aware that wild flower seed packs might contain invasive species for your area*
- *Bee sure the plants you are buying are not produced with neonics*
- *Bee a friend, and share this story with your networks.*