



The Buzz on Pesticides

There's something gratifying about installing a job and then taking a step back to admire your work. What's not so gratifying is when you go back and those evil, pest insects have arrived. Though you can't blame them for thriving in a beautiful interiorscape paradise, you have to make them vacate - forever.

Conversion Junction

The first step in the process is identifying your pest. You may need to take a sample to your local extension office or an independent lab. Don't guess! This is a waste of your time and money. Once the culprit has been identified, select a product that specifically lists your pest on the label. Be sure it is labeled for the job site.

Pay close attention to application rates listed on a product's label. Most products give rates for large volume applications. Take time to do the conversions correctly if you're only applying a small volume. If the product is mixed at a low rate, you will not get the kill; and if mixed too high, it can be a health hazard to you and the plants.

Before heading to the job site be sure you're familiar with everything on the pesticide label, especially precautions that must be taken.

Above Applying pesticides is an important part of maintaining a bug-free, interiorscape environment. Follow all precautions.

Avoiding Alkaline

One very important aspect of mixing pesticides is water. Water is a carrier for pesticides and can affect how they work. Water's pH can determine the effectiveness of some pesticides.

When a pesticide is mixed with alkaline water, or water with a pH value greater than 7, a chemical reaction may occur. This reaction can cause the pesticide's active ingredient to be less effective. Also, it can cause the pesticide to break down quickly, inhibiting residual efficacy. In extreme cases, the product may not be effective by the time you get to the end of the spray tank.

A water pH of 4.5 to 5.5 is ideal. The best way to test spray water is with a pH meter. The least expensive option is pH paper, though it is less accurate.

An easy-to-use product is Phase 5, manufactured by Brandt Consolidated. It's a color-coded pH adjuster that interiorscapers can pour into spray water until it reaches the desired pH, indicated by the resulting color.

Phase 5 acts as a buffer, holding the pH at the right level. It contains a surfactant, or spreader/sticker, to evenly distribute the spray across leaves and stems, usually resulting in better spray coverage. Mix this in your water before you add the pesticide.

If your spray water's pH checks out, and no adjustment is needed, you may still need a spreader/sticker - this is not always true with electrostatic sprayers.

Check the label or ask your supplier if one is needed.

Static Cling

Applications of pesticides can be made a few different ways.

Conventional sprayers are economical and rather low tech, but they get the job done. There are concerns with this method because of the large volume of spray that must be applied to get full coverage. This may lead to wet floors, overspray and runoff, which usually can be translated to longer clean-up time.

The electrostatic sprayer isn't a cheap alternative. The initial investment can be costly, but if you have large jobs to treat, in the long run, they're a great way to go. The machines work by charging the spray solution, causing it to stick to plant surfaces, allowing better underleaf coverage, where many pest insects and mites often hide. The machine's electrostatic action causes less product to be used because there is no overspray or run-off.

When finished, follow your states' guidelines for clean up. Improper disposal of pesticides and their containers may pose a potential hazard to humans and the environment. Know what to do in case of an emergency before you use a pesticide. 🌿

Entomological Science Correspondent Suzanne Wainwright-Evans is an Ornamental Entomologist specializing in pest management programs. She has been involved in the green industry for more than 10 years. Her primary focus is biological control.