What's the Matter with Roundup?

As the toxicity of herbicides like 2,4D became increasingly clear, some turned to products with the active ingredient glyphosate, like Roundup and Rodeo.

Glyphosate is a broad spectrum post-emergent, systemic, and non-selective herbicide used to kill broad-leaved, grass, and sedge species. It’s the nation’s second most commonly-used home and garden pesticide, and the third most commonly-used on industrial and commercial land. Each year 38 to 48 million pounds are used in the U.S., with about 25 million applications in U.S. households.

Unfortunately, while better than 2,4D, Roundup is not as safe as some believe (or even claim!). Here are some important facts:

- **Harm to Humans and Animals.** Glyphosate products are acutely toxic to humans and animals, with symptoms like eye and skin irritation (lasting up to 7 days), cardiac depression, gastrointestinal pain, vomiting, and accumulation of excess fluid in the lungs.

  Glyphosate is the highest cause of pesticide illness for California landscape maintenance workers, and the third most commonly-reported cause of pesticide illness among agricultural workers.

- **One ingredient in Roundup (POEA) is actually more toxic than glyphosate, with the combination even more toxic. (The testing that allowed Roundup on the market was just for glyphosate, not the full formula, a serious flaw in the pesticide regulation system.)**

Unfortunately, while better than 2,4D, Roundup is not as safe as some believe (or even claim!). Here are some important facts:

- **Harm to Humans and Animals.** Glyphosate products are acutely toxic to humans and animals, with symptoms like eye and skin irritation (lasting up to 7 days), cardiac depression, gastrointestinal pain, vomiting, and accumulation of excess fluid in the lungs.

Got Weeds?

What’s a weed really? Just a plant growing where you don’t want it! So what do you do about unwanted plants if you prefer not to use herbicides but don’t have time to weed?

One easy solution is mulching with leaves, grass clippings, wood chips, and other materials that suppress weed growth.

Another creative option is planting stronger plants that keep the unwanted ones at bay – while also holding the precious soil and nutrients in place.

For instance, you can plant living ground cover around bushes, trees, or along the street for both beauty and easy maintenance. And if you choose native plants, maintenance is even easier and you encourage beneficial local insects and birds.

What to plant? Here are some ideas from local native plant experts:

- **Festuca rubra** (spreading native grass; grows up to 6-12”)
- **Scirpus** (“fiber optics” native grass; grows up to 8”)

If you have large areas where you’d like to alleviate high grass or weeds or where you want to keep away invasive alien grasses, star thistle, and burr clovers – consider planting clover. It helps build up your soil’s health, doesn’t grow to a fire hazard, looks good, and helps our struggling honeybee population.

To try different varieties in your spot, first dig or disc away the grass, then try seeding different clover varieties in clearly marked sections. Water as needed until they’re established. Then watch them grow to see what works best for you.

These are just a few ideas to get you started! Explore your options and get further advice from books, websites, or a nursery specializing in natives. Find some plants you like and that match the sun, water, and soil type of your growing area. Then spend the time you would’ve weeded watching your plants grow!

Note: Some plants, such as certain roses, don’t like anything growing right under them. Use mulch instead, being careful not to mulch above the crown or graft.

— Rebecca Dwan

STEP On The Web

Want to let others know about the STEP program and share the information in our newsletters? Want to see back issues? It’s all there at <www.admin.ci.sebastopol.ca.us>
Community Gardening with PEA

■ On April 6th, 7th, and 8th, Planting Earth Activation (PEA) presented a three-day festival and planting weekend in Sebastopol. On Friday, community members gathered to work in the Sebastopol Community Garden on Laguna Parkway. Saturday brought a benefit concert at the Sebastopol Masonic Hall as 300 people came and were inspired by the timeless mystical poetry of Rumi. And STEP also benefited from the evening! Many thanks to organizers Larry Robinson, Jeff Edelheit, and Dan Zola who donated $500 of the proceeds to support the work of STEP (as well as $500 to KRCB). Bravo, bravo!

A Great Night of Rumi

It was standing room only at Sebastopol’s Masonic Hall as 300 people came and were inspired by the timeless mystical poetry of Rumi. And STEP also benefited from the evening! Many thanks to organizers Larry Robinson, Jeff Edelheit, and Dan Zola who donated $500 of the proceeds to support the work of STEP (as well as $500 to KRCB). Bravo, bravo!

You can help make STEP possible! Write an article, share your success story, or be a liaison to businesses and schools. Together we can support our community’s conversion to less-toxic alternatives! To find out more, call Patricia Dines at 829-2108 for more information about PEAs work.

■ On April 6th, 7th, and 8th, Planting Earth Activation (PEA) presented a three-day festival and planting weekend in Sebastopol. On Friday, community members gathered to work in the Sebastopol Community Garden on Laguna Parkway. Saturday brought a benefit concert at the Sebastopol Masonic Hall as 300 people came and were inspired by the timeless mystical poetry of Rumi. And STEP also benefited from the evening! Many thanks to organizers Larry Robinson, Jeff Edelheit, and Dan Zola who donated $500 of the proceeds to support the work of STEP (as well as $500 to KRCB). Bravo, bravo!

ROUNDUP, continued

 Glyphosate can cause other long-term damage. Population studies show increased miscarriages and non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. Animal studies show genetic damage, reduced sperm counts, cataracts, and thyroid, pancreas, and liver tumors.

■ Harm to Ecosystems. Studies have shown that Roundup kills beneficial insects and is hazardous to earthworms, which are vital for soil health and vitality.

■ Long-lasting. The manufacturer’s own tests show that it takes up to 140 days for half the glyphosate to break down or disappear. Residues were found in lettuce, carrots, and barley planted a year after treatment.

■ Able to Drift. Tests conducted by the University of California, Davis, found that glyphosate drifted up to 1,300 feet during ground applications. This increases unintended exposure and harm to humans, animals – and plants you want to keep!

So, what’s the alternative? See the article on the other side for easy options. Or maybe just see through a child’s eyes, where those dandelions are not a problem but a delight!

~ Patricia Dines