



# The Nursery Papers

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION FOR AUSTRALIAN PROFESSIONAL NURSERY OPERATORS

EDITED BY IAN ATKINSON, NATIONAL IDM, ISSN: 1326-1495 ISSUE NO: 1999-02

## Advising gardeners about controlling pests, diseases and weeds

Market studies have found that one of the most valued services provided by garden centres is good advice. This is also a growing part of the retail market and represents a real opportunity for the Australian gardening industry. In addition many government departments are referring gardeners to you for advice on their problems. How prepared is your business to provide accurate and useful information on pest, disease and weed control to your customers and the legal implications of selling pesticides?

### The basic steps

1. What is the problem? Identify the pest and what damage it is causing - is action really needed? Sometimes 'Do nothing' is good advice
2. Identify **all** the control options - pesticides are not the only ones available. Recommend the best **mix** of control options
3. Get customer feedback on what works and what doesn't. Use this process and information to fine tune your advice.

**What is the problem? Identify the pest and what damage it is causing - is action really needed? Sometimes 'Do nothing' is good advice.**

Identifying common pests, disease and weeds is a learned skill. So take advantage of every opportunity to train yourself and your staff. Most [state associations](#) and organisations like TAFE run courses in P&D control, Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and in related areas. Check them out and if you don't think they meet your needs, say so ! They are often more than willing to organise new training opportunities if there are enough 'bums on seats'.

What reference material do you keep for staff and customers to use in identifying problems?

Forget the overseas books or those written for scientists like the *Compendium of Rose Diseases* and concentrate on good local titles like;

- *Handbook of the Major Pests and Diseases of Nursery Plants* (less than \$20 from your local state association or [NIAA](#))
- *What garden pest or disease is that?* (by Judy McMaugh, the new edition is about \$50)
- *Ornamental Plants - pests, diseases & disorders* (published by the Qld DPI and available for \$32)

If the problem is beyond control then do nothing or 'rip it up and throw it away' can be better advice than using pesticides. No-one likes using pesticides so the customer will appreciate your honesty. Give people the options and let them decide.

**Identify all the control options - pesticides are not the only ones available. Recommend the best mix of control options.**

Modern horticulture relies on the use of pesticides to produce a quality product but sometimes we forget the other options. Can't keep the fruit fly out of your tomatoes? Could you grow them at a different time of year? Snails attacking your prized specimens? What about physical barriers? Too many two spotted mites? They hate water so can you use that against them?

Applying a combination of control measures will often succeed where a 'simple fix' fails. Many plants are more resistant to pest and disease attack if they are growing well. So inquire about when they were last fertilised, or pruned, and are they too crowded for healthy growth? Well timed fertiliser applications help suppress the growth of broadleaf weeds in lawns. Look at the whole picture and sell solutions not just products.

**Get customer feedback on what works and what doesn't. Use this process and information to fine tune your advice.**

Record the pest, disease and weed problems brought to you by your customers into a recording system that you can use to examine local trends. Use this information to prepare a schedule of 'Common problems and solutions' for use by staff and customers alike. Used wisely this is also a sales tool, it will help you sell solutions not just products.

## **Legalities of selling pesticides**

### ***National Registration***

The [National Registration Authority for Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals \(NRA\)](#) in Canberra is the Australian agency responsible for regulating agricultural and veterinary (agvet) chemicals up to the point of retail sale. Household and home garden products for pest and weed control have been deemed to be agricultural chemical products.

### **Registering agricultural and veterinary chemical products**

Generally before agvet chemical products can be sold, supplied, distributed or used in Australia, they must be registered by the NRA. So called 'organic' pesticides must also be registered, if the product claims to control pests it should be registered. The registration process is governed by

Commonwealth legislation and undertaken according to accepted scientific principles and through rigorous independent analysis by several government agencies and the NRA.

Variations to the formulation of a currently registered product must also be approved, as must proposed new patterns of use and new labels. This includes changes to the current use pattern or the products claims. The NRA can grant a permit to allow the use of agvet chemicals in some way not specified on the label but this is usually reserved for commercial agvet products.

To get independent information on what products are registered for different uses there are two excellent sources of information. If you have access to a good computer with CD drive at the nursery then *Infopest*, \$95 from the Qld. DPI (ph 07 3239 3967), is recommended. Otherwise call Gatton College (07 5460 1291) and get a copy of the *Garden Peskem* book for \$30.

### **Storing agvet chemicals (includes retail display)**

**There are a few simple rules worth applying; Are products marked ‘Keep Out of Reach of Children’ kept out of their reach? Will the floor contain the contents of a broken container? Do staff know what to do in event of an emergency?**

**There is also a new Australian standard AS 2507-1998 for ‘The storage and handling of agricultural and veterinary chemicals’ with a special section on retail stores. To buy a copy phone Standards Australia 1300 65 46 46 .**

### ***Agricultural chemical products***

The definition of ‘Agricultural chemical products’ includes any substance or organism used to:

- destroy, stupefy, repel, inhibit the feeding of, or prevent pests on plants or other things;
- destroy a plant or to modify its physiology;
- modify the effect of another agricultural chemical product; or
- attract a pest for the purpose of destroying it.

### ***Inspection of retail premises***

NRA inspectors regularly visit retail premises to ensure products and suppliers are complying with the law. Premises may include nurseries, pet shops, supermarkets, rural chemical suppliers and hardware stores.

Inspectors look for unregistered products and any products that are incorrectly labeled or advertised in a misleading way. If a product is found, the inspector notifies the store owner how best to remedy the non-compliance. Two weeks later the inspector returns to check that this action is under way. If non-compliance continues after additional warnings, then the NRA may take legal action which can result in a fine of up to \$30,000.

Retailers are therefore best advised to check that the products they sell are registered by asking the product distributor for the product's registration number. If any doubt remains, the NRA can of course confirm the registration status of a product, phone 02 6272 5852.

## The label

**The label on a registered pesticide is a legal document. Don't cover any part of it with price stickers or other information. With few exceptions you should always recommend that gardeners use the product in accordance with the label directions. It is a legal requirement for users to READ THE LABEL.**

Labels are also subject to inspection and retailers are advised to confirm that labels are approved when taking delivery of stock. Any labels or changes to labels that have not been approved by the NRA are likely to be detected when inspectors visit. For more information about the NRA Compliance Program ph: 02 6272 4408 fax 02 6272 4753.

## National Training Course

It is strongly recommended that people involved in the sale of pesticides undertake appropriate training. The National Farm Chemical Users Course is promoted in each state and territory under names such as FarmSafe and ChemSafe. Whilst the course is primarily designed for those using agvet products the information is invaluable for anyone advising users including gardeners. The course could be tailored specifically for garden centre operators and staff if there was sufficient interest. Contact your [state nursery industry association](#) for more information.

### *State and Territory legislation*

The use of chemicals after they are sold is controlled not by the NRA but by specific State and Territory legislation. They also control some of the aspects of selling agvet products, particularly in relation to providing advice or recommending use. Whilst the intent of most of this legislation is similar unfortunately there are too many variations for this paper to deal with accurately. Just to illustrate some of the differences relating to selling and using agvet products have a look at Table 1. For full details contact your local regulating authority.

## Acknowledgments

This paper has been compiled by Ian Atkinson, NIAA, from a number of sources including the NRA website. Thanks to the various state authorities for supplying the information for Table 1. The illustrations by Nick Harding come from an out of print NSW Agriculture publication *Care with pesticides around the house*.

**Table 1. Impact of state or territory agvet chemical use legislation on gardeners (users) and agvet chemical retailers (nurseries) legal obligations.**

<b>Within the scope of the relevant local pesticide use laws can you;</b>	<b>WA</b>	<b>NT</b>	<b>QLD</b>	<b>NSW</b>	<b>ACT</b>	<b>VIC</b>	<b>T</b>
a. use a lower rate than that shown on the registered label?	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	No	Yes*	Yes*	N
b. use it on a crop shown on the label to control a pest or disease not shown on the registered label?	No	Yes*	Yes*	No	No	Yes*	N
c. use it on a crop not shown on the registered label?	No	No	No	No	No	Yes*	N
d. recommend or use it at a stronger rate or more often than that shown on the registered label?	No	No	No	No	No	No	N
e. recommend a lower rate than that shown on the registered label?	Yes*	No	No	No	No	Yes*	N
f. recommend its use on a crop shown on the label to control a pest or disease not shown on the registered label?	No	No	No	No	No	Yes*	N
g. recommend its use on a crop not shown on the registered label?	No	No	No	No	No	Yes*	N
* unless subject to specific restrictions or prohibited by the label.							
? The SA legislation is under review with major changes likely during 1999.							



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