

CLARIFICATIONS ABOUT ORGANIC LAWN CARE AND ORGANIC PESTICIDES

The last meeting of the ordinance committee featured several misstatements about organic vs. conventional lawn care and organic vs. conventional pesticides. I hope that at the next meeting on June 8th we will hear from organic lawn care experts. Meanwhile, here are key points:

1. Organic lawn and landscape care is not a matter of substituting one set of pesticides and fertilizers for another. Rather, organic methods use and support natural systems to build and maintain healthy soil, soil organisms, appropriate plants and turf, and local ecology. **Pesticides are always a last resort.**

2. Substances allowed on the USDA's national organic list are NOT equivalent to conventional pesticides and fertilizers when it comes to toxicity to living things. They are selected "to have no adverse effects to humans or the environment." The other two criteria for inclusion on the list are "need for the material (essentiality) in an organic system, and compatibility with organic practices."

<https://www.beyondpesticides.org/assets/media/documents/bp-37.1-OrgLandscapeMngmt.pdf>

3. Also allowed as organic are EPA's minimum risk pesticides. EPA has determined that these "pose little to no risk to human health or the environment" and exempted them from registration under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act. (FIFRA)

<https://www.epa.gov/minimum-risk-pesticides/minimum-risk-pesticide-definition-and-product-confirmation>

4. Although claims were made at the last meeting that pesticides that ARE registered by EPA are safe when used according to the label, this is not the case. The EPA explicitly states that its pesticide registration process is no guarantee of safety. The EPA specifically prohibits claims as to the safety of a pesticide or its ingredients, whether or not used in accordance with label instructions. (40 CFR sec. 156.10(a)(5)(ix)).

5. Pesticides are poisons. They are designed to be toxic. They have toxic effects on humans and other nontarget organisms, including pollinators and marine and aquatic life.

6. Many peer-reviewed studies show adverse health effects of lawn pesticides on humans and ecosystems.

<https://www.beyondpesticides.org/assets/media/Health%20Effects%20of%2040%20Lawn%20Pesticides%202021.pdf>

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26371195/>

<https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/full/10.1289/EHP11721>

<https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-05/ESA-JAM-Analysis.pdf>

7. There is no need to use pesticides on lawns and home gardens. Both the US Cooperative Extension and the Maine Board of Pesticides Control promote organic home lawn care.

https://www.maine.gov/dacf/php/pesticides/yardscaping/press/documents/YardScaping_Spring-Lawn-Article_final_5-23-08.pdf

8. Requiring organic lawn fertilizer would do even more to support human and environmental health in Cape. <https://www.beyondpesticides.org/assets/media/documents/bp-37.3-fa17-Fertilizers.pdf>