Summer gardening and landscaping can be enjoyable, but the pesticides you use to control destructive insects could affect your health as well. In fact, pesticides and herbicides may be some of the most dangerous chemicals we use. No pesticide is 100 percent safe; even commonly used products have been linked to a wide range of disorders, including an increased risk of cancer. If you must use pesticides, follow these precautions to be as safe as possible:

- Avoid overkill. Identify the pest or disease you want to eradicate, and then choose a product designed for that problem.
- Read the label carefully. It should include the manufacturer’s phone number for emergency information.
- Buy only the amount you think you’ll use in the next month or two. If you must store pesticides, put them in a locked cabinet away from food, first-aid supplies and other chemicals. Leave it in the original container. For extra protection against leakage, place the container inside another airtight plastic container. Save all instructions and warning labels.
- When transporting a pesticide home from the store, put it in the trunk of your car and make sure that it can’t be knocked over.
- For concentrated pesticides, be certain that you use the proper dilution.
- Apply pesticides on a still day to lessen the chance that the wind will carry the chemical elsewhere. Warn your neighbors before you spray.
- Remove toys, lawn furniture and barbecue grills from the area, or completely cover them with plastic.
- Cover pools or ponds, especially if they contain fish.
- Never mix products together.
- Some weed killers, such as those with sodium chlorate and potassium chlorate, are explosive, particularly in the dry state. They may explode or cause a fire if dropped or shaken violently.
- Keep children and pets indoors when pesticides are applied. Check the instructions to see when the area will be safe. Some products require only a few hours, but others are not safe until it rains.
- Close the windows of your house and car if they are near the area being treated. Avoid spraying near a water supply.
- Wear rubber utility gloves, a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, and a hat while applying pesticides. Choose rubber or vinyl shoes and wear a mask, goggles or other equipment indicated on the label.
- Remove outer clothing and shoes before entering the house and wash them separately from other laundry. Discard clothing that is doused with the chemical.
- Thoroughly rinse the tools you’ve used. Take a shower to wash the chemicals from your skin and hair.
- Use caution when disposing of pesticides, even if the container is empty. Follow label instructions or contact your local health department about proper disposal options and community hazardous waste collections.
- Leftover products should never be poured down the sink, and never burn pesticide containers.

Some information excerpted courtesy of www.makesafetyfun.com, Richard Hawke, Inc.

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