

The Case Against the “Neonics”

In 2014, we at Eldredge Lumber and Hardware had the audacity to remove from the shelves of our stores, the largest selling class of insecticides on the planet. These neonicotinoids have annual sales in excess 3.7 billion dollars, a figure that is growing rapidly.

Neonicotinoids are a systemic insecticide. They are taken up in the roots of a treated plant and expressed in the leaves, flowers, nectar and pollen of that plant. They are very effective in killing insects that feed on plant tissue, and are now used ubiquitously in conventional factory farming and greenhouse production of flowers, fruits, herbs and vegetables worldwide, and as a prophylactic treatment for all our lawn and landscape insect problems.

As it is with all lawn and landscape chemicals, the “neonics”, by their very nature are problematic. They were never evaluated for their lethal effect on non-target species, such as bees, birds, and aquatic organisms, nor their sub-lethal effect on these species or humans for that matter. These damaging effects are only now slowly becoming known. What’s worse, they are marketed to be used on every plant every year, regardless of whether an insect problem actually exists. And perhaps most important of all, the EPA, an agency that “never met a chemical it did not like” (in the words of former EPA scientist E. G. Vallianatos), does not require testing of these chemicals for their detrimental effects on the soil food web, a vast network of billions of micro-organisms which have been facilitating the production and transfer of essential plant nutrients in soil for some 400,000,000 years.

Protection and enhancement of this soil food web is at the very heart of the organic movement. Soil health equals plant and environmental health. At Eldredge, we solve our customers landscape problems with organic products and techniques. We do not sell neonicotinoids. We do not sell glyphosate. We do not sell chemical lawn treatments of any kind. We have built our own greenhouses to guarantee the safety of our live plants. We made these decisions because we believe it is the right thing to do, and because organic methods and products work, not because we thought it would be good for business. But it has been very good for business, and not just in the land and garden department. Moving away from chemical warfare with the environment is energizing our customers.

This energy needs to be concentrated to rid ourselves of this chemical dependency beginning with the neonicotinoids. As an Ace affiliate we encourage others in the Ace network to make a change to organics starting with the elimination of the neonicotinoids. We refuse to take part in Ace’s endless promotion of these chemicals. More importantly, as consumers we need to vote with our conscience and our pocketbooks. Call Ace, call Home Depot, call your local hardware store or garden center. Ask if their plants have been treated with neonics (ask us too). Join an advocacy group. Learn the names of the 8 neonics. Only buy organic or grow your own. It’s the only way to be safe and sure.

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