



GARDEN PRODUCTS

Many of us rely on pesticides to kill garden pests & insects, herbicides to kill weeds, and fertilisers to improve the nutrient content of our soil. But all three of these have a negative impact on the environment.

Pesticides and herbicides especially get into the food chain, working their way up through insects to birds and rodents, and harming the balance of our local ecosystem. Fertilisers often leach off and pollute the water, damaging the harmony there.

Slugs are a particular problem for gardeners in Ireland as our moist, mild climate allows them to thrive.

Many common brands of slug pellets are toxic and responsible for killing pets & birds every year that inadvertently eat the slug pellets. Such pellets also wipe out beneficial insects and earthworms, look out for eco-friendlier versions based on an iron compound, or alternatively check out these simple, “home-made” options for keeping slugs at bay:

- Use copper piping on the edge of beds as slugs won't cross this medium
- Try spreading crushed egg shells, pine needles, straw, sawdust or shredded bark near your beds as a slug repellent
- Plant lavender, thyme, sage, mint and



geraniums – all disliked by slugs again acting as a natural repellent

- Set up a “Slug Pub” or Beer Trap to intoxicate garden slugs into an untimely death.

We often reach for well known brands or “old favorites” when we purchase products to help us garden, but just looking at the ingredients on the labels of many of these gardening products and the hazardous symbols displayed on the labels should make us think twice and reach for an alternative which is more environmentally sympathetic.

For example:

1. Pesticides.

Insects in the garden are often a huge concern to gardeners. But in fact, they need not be as big a deal as they are. If your garden is in good health, then bugs are less likely to be able to damage or kill your plants. For those insects that truly are voracious, consider an organic alternative to pesticides, such as a soap and water spray or introducing natural predators, such as ladybirds into your garden. There are lots of gardening websites, books and evening classes which offer a wealth of advice on “chemical free” and organic gardening.

2. Herbicides.

The best way to get rid of weeds without resorting to herbicides is, of course, to pull them by hand. But for those who would rather enjoy a garden without so much work, mulch is your best bet. Bark mulch spread 6 to 8 inches deep will

keep ninety-nine percent of weeds from being able to grow. Those that do can be easily pulled in just a few seconds. Mulch should be spread in the spring and autumn whenever possible; 3 to 4 inches twice a year will make a huge difference to keeping weeds at bay.

3. Fertiliser.

Why not make your own compost and start to use this as an alternative to store bought fertilisers? A third of all household waste is organic, all raw fruit and vegetable matter can be composted making a nutrient rich product suitable for gardening. In addition most of the urban areas within the Limerick Clare Kerry Region are serviced with a “brown bin” collection which takes both raw and cooked food waste from householders and converts it to compost. Cré (the Composting Association of Ireland) has just undertaken a project to determine a quality standard for compost derived from source-separated biodegradable materials in order to promote the development of markets for compost-based products on the island of Ireland as well as to protect human, plant, soil and animal health.

So very soon we should be able to purchase compost for use as fertiliser in our gardens which is derived from food waste collected from households and businesses in Ireland.

In the meantime some of the region’s Civic Amenity Centres offer free mulch to customers made from garden waste deposited at the sites. Ask at your local Civic Amenity Centre whether they offer this service or not.

Alternatively if you can get it, manure

from a local farm is an excellent replacement for petroleum-based fertilisers, but caution is advised, please ensure manure is spread properly as it can be as harmful to the water courses as petroleum-based fertilisers due to its nutrient rich properties. Properly spread, however, and lightly composted before planting, it works wonders for the sluggish garden.

In terms of garden furniture, fences, shed and decking which require treating look out for more eco-friendly alternatives than the more traditional type of wood preserver. Check out your local DIY store and ask the retail assistant for advice, read the labels carefully to ensure the product suits your needs. Buy only what you need and use sparingly.

