

Be Sure to Read the Fine Print

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

How many times have you heard someone say that you've got to read the fine print? There's good wisdom in that because the important details are often in the fine print. The same thing goes for herbicide labels for lawn weeds. Homeowners will buy a product and then call me up and ask me how to mix it up. I just want to sometimes scream, "can't you read?" The challenge is that products change from company to company and even year to year. What's in "Lawn Weed Killer" this year, may be different in the same product next year!

The label on that product isn't just generally good advice, it technically is the law! (The same goes for agricultural pesticides as well as homeowner lawn and garden pesticides.) It tells you what is in the product. It tells you how it is to be used. It tells you what plants/crops it can be used on and what pests it is designed to control. It tells you how to mix the product and how to use the product. In some cases the label even tells you what weather conditions (wind speed, temperature, relative humidity, etc.) it should or shouldn't be used in. Everything you need to know is on that label. Granted, you may need a magnifying glass and an hour of time to read it, but it's there!

Sometimes homeowners will call me up and say that the label says to use 1 ounce per gallon, but they want to use 2 ounces and want to know if I think that's okay. If the label doesn't say that you can mix 2 ounces per gallon, I can't instruct you otherwise, in fact I won't instruct you otherwise! Sometimes the label may give you a range of rates and in that case I can tell you whether you need to mix it at the upper end of the range or if you can get by on the lower end of the range.

Sometimes homeowners will complain that a product didn't do what they thought it should. As we visit and look at the label it may say to mix one ounce per gallon of water and spray it on 300 square feet of lawn. But if that gallon was sprayed on 500 square feet of lawn, then the homeowner will have under-applied the product, not enough herbicide landed on the weed so it wasn't controlled!

Yes, I've preached this before, dozens of times, so why am I bringing it up again? The herbicide Roundup came out in the 1980s as the original formulation of the active ingredient glyphosate. Glyphosate pretty much kills all green growing plants that it lands on. There are a few exceptions but around a yard, if it's green, Glyphosate (Roundup) will kill it or at least seriously damage it.

Now, in what I feel is a very questionable marketing move, the company has released on the marketplace a herbicide called Roundup for Lawns. Roundup for Lawns is a mixture of four herbicides designed to control a wide variety of weeds in lawns. In fact very similar mixes are already on the market under a number of different names. If used according to label directions it should provide excellent control of many lawn weeds. HOWEVER, if someone isn't reading a label and they grab Roundup instead of Roundup for Lawns, and they spray their lawn, they will kill the weeds AND the grass.

Read. The. Label. If the active ingredient (listed on the front of the label in fine print) is glyphosate, it will kill everything. If you see a list of names that includes things like MCPA, Dicamba, Quinclorac and Sulfentrazone, then it can be used on your yard safely. But still, read the label and follow all the directions!