

This Ain't Your Daddy's Roundup

By Larry Caplan, Extension Horticulture Educator, Vanderburgh County, IN

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I hope you can join me this Saturday for the annual Master Gardener Plant Sale. The sale will be held one day only, on Saturday, May 6, from 8 am to 4 pm, at the Vanderburgh 4-H Center. We will be in the Auditorium building.

This plant sale is the single biggest fund raiser for the Southwestern Indiana Master Gardener Association (SWIMGA). Dozens of Master Gardeners will be on hand throughout the day to tell you all about the nearly 15 thousand plants we will be selling! The money raised through this sale funds all of our demonstration gardens, as well as our public outreach and educational projects.

For many of us who have gardened for years, the name "Roundup" is synonymous with its active ingredient, glyphosate. This chemical is a non-selective herbicide, which means it kills almost anything green it lands on. Glyphosate can be used nearly everywhere that total kill of the vegetation is needed, such as in driveways, around trees, and where new lawns and gardens will be started.

The name Roundup, though, has become almost a generic descriptor for "total weed killer," just like people use the word "Coke" to mean any soft drink, or "Tylenol" for headache relief. And that can lead to many problems.

There are nearly 40 different Roundup products labeled for use in the state of Indiana. Some of these are for agriculture usage, and some for landscape and garden usage. Some are low concentration ready-to-use products, and there are dozens of concentrates of different strengths that need to be diluted with different amounts of water. Some of the Roundups have additional chemicals added to kill weeds faster, or prevent weed seed germination, or foam up when applied.

But until this spring, all of them contained glyphosate, and you knew that you were going to get total vegetation kill when you used them. However, Roundup for Lawns (R4L) is different. This product doesn't contain a drop of glyphosate. It is not a total kill product. It is meant to be sprayed on a lawn, to kill everything that is not a turfgrass plant. The active ingredient in Roundup for Lawns are MCPA, quinclorac, dicamba and sulfentrazone. These herbicides are effective on a broad range of weeds that might infest the lawn such as dandelion, crabgrass and nutsedge.

This is a problem in my opinion, because many people don't fully read the label before buying a pesticide. They are going to see the word "Roundup" and grab it for killing the vegetation in their ditch, or driveway. And they'll kill some of the plants, but the grasses will just keep growing, because R4L is not going to kill the grass. They will then call me, or the garden center, and complain about the lousy product which didn't work...without realizing that it was never going to work the way they thought.

Worse yet...people may get used to using this as a different version of a Weed Be Gone product for their lawns. And then one day, they'll grab regular Roundup, and accidentally kill huge sections of their lawn (people already do that...and I've got the photos to prove it).

Bottom line: read the label directions carefully before buying and using any pesticide product. If you have questions about weed control products, contact the Purdue Extension Service at (812) 435-5287.