

Pest Management FAQs

Why are pesticides used in public gardens and parks?

- Protect plants from defoliation by insects and pathogens
- Prevent plant death
- Maintain grass density
- Mitigate reproduction and spread of pests, pathogens, and weed seeds
- Increase bloom
- Prevent wilt and rot
- Support normal growth (especially if multiple stress factors are present)
- Reduce weed competition with desirable plants for light, water, and nutrients
- Legal mandate (Noxious weeds such as thistle have roots so deep and extensive that they are best managed chemically)
- Prevent harm to people (poison ivy, mosquitoes, manage weeds to minimize trip hazards)
- Protect infrastructure (weeds expand cracks in pavement)
- Preserve function (maintain good grass density, kill woody growth in some types of stormwater facilities)
- Restore balance (ecosystems, ponds, rain gardens, etc.)
- Stop invasion by exotic species

What types of products are used?

- Herbicides
- Insecticides
- Fungicides
- Botanicals

How are pesticides applied in parks and gardens?

- Sprayed
- Injected
- Painted on cut surfaces and bark
- Drench
- Granular, applied to surface

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What steps do gardens take to protect the public from pesticides?

- Applications are timed to avoid visitors whenever possible. Pesticide applications occur on a “closed” day; however, if gardens or garden areas are continually open, applications are performed at a time of day when the fewest visitors are present.
- Timing and targeting is also improved by monitoring pest populations on site. This is accomplished with support from volunteers and students who gather data and map pest populations.
- Product selection is based on scientific data for effectiveness (this reduces the number of applications), safety for non-target organisms, safety of humans, safety for mammals, and safety for the plants (phytotoxicity).
- Licensing and training of staff who apply pesticides is required by law.
- Pesticide product labels contain detailed instructions that protect people, and the environment-applicators must follow label instruction because the label is the law.
- The method of application used can also protect the public. Systemic products applied to the soil or injected into trees are safer than spray applications that may have the potential to drift.
- Signs are posted warning of pesticide application. Signs may be at entrances to the area, or around its perimeter.
- Chemically sensitive patrons can phone prior to visiting and ask if, when, and where applications are scheduled.
- Some states, including Maryland, have Pesticide Sensitive registries. Individuals can register and will receive notification prior to a pesticide application to an adjacent park or property.

If I see someone spraying when I am walking through the garden, what should I do?

- Avoid the area, take a different path. Most pesticide labels allow entry when dry; the time interval can vary due to environmental factors such as humidity and temperature.