



Making Pesticide Applications in School/Community Gardens

Pesticide Safety Education Program

Nothing tastes better than produce you have grown. Before you can harvest and share your bounty, you may have to manage pests which can reduce your yields. Insects, diseases, and weeds can be controlled by various methods. Pesticides are an important tool in pest management; in order to use pesticides legally and safely, there are a few things you must know. You may need to obtain a license to apply pesticides from the Illinois Department of Agriculture per the Illinois Pesticide Act. This fact sheet will help guide you to determine if you need one.

Is a license needed?

Whether you need a license or not depends on two things: what type of pesticide you are applying and where you are applying it.

If you are applying pesticides on land that you do NOT own such as a school or park, you must have a license. If you own the land or if you rent/lease the land such as a community garden plot, you need a license only if the pesticide you apply is a Restricted Use Pesticide (RUP). Restricted Use Pesticides will be clearly marked at the top of the product label on the container; you must be licensed to buy RUP products.

General Use Pesticides (GUP's) such as most of the products sold in garden centers or home improvement stores do not require a license unless they are applied to someone else's property.

What about organic pest killers?

These products are still classified as pesticides by the US-EPA. If a product makes pesticidal claims, it needs to be registered with the EPA and will have a registration number on the label.

Certain minimum risk pesticides do not require Federal registration. EPA's "25b list", which includes garlic and garlic oil, can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2018-01/documents/minrisk-active-ingredients-tolerances-jan-2018.pdf>.

Illinois has the right to require registration of these products regardless of whether the US-EPA has required registration. If it does, you may still need a license to apply depending on where it is applied. You can search for active ingredient registration at <https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/agr/Pesticides/Pages/Pesticide-Product-Results.aspx> or call the Illinois Department of Agriculture (numbers given below).

What about home remedies?

While home remedies may sometimes work, many have not been tested for effectiveness or safety. They commonly cost more than labeled, registered pesticides which have been tested for human health and environmental safety. To avoid potential problems, stick to approved pesticide products.

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What about fertilizers?

Fertilizers are not pesticides and do not require any type of license to be applied. Keep in mind that weed and feed products contain herbicides which are pesticides.

What type of license is needed?

Below are some situations:

*If you own the land, a Private license is needed only if you apply a restricted use product.

*If you do not own the land and pesticides are applied for hire (the exchange of money), a Commercial license is needed.

*Where no money is exchanged for application, a Commercial “not-for-hire” license is needed; this probably is the case for most community gardens.

Licenses are tied to a specific type of application, or category. For example, someone could have a Commercial not-for-hire license to apply pesticides to vegetable crops. These types or categories are explained later in this factsheet.

Why is licensing needed?

It is necessary to demonstrate to the public that you know how to apply pesticides safely and effectively. Plus, it's the law.

Do I need to get a license or can someone else do it?

Many municipalities, schools and park districts already have personnel licensed for landscape or indoor pest control and they might be willing to add the appropriate category to their license. If there is any question about who can legally spray a garden or the areas around it, contact the Illinois Department of Agriculture for clarification.

How do I get licensed?

You will need to take the General Standards exam (100 multiple-choice questions) and score at least a 70%. This will qualify you to become licensed as a pesticide “operator”. Once you qualify, you must submit a completed license application form along with the appropriate licensing fee. However, at least one person from your school or community garden will need to go one step further and become licensed as a pesticide “applicator”. Operators work under the direct supervision of the applicator. An operator can become an applicator by scoring at least a 70% on an appropriate category exam (50 multiple-choice questions) and applying for licensure. There are various categories including Turfgrass, Ornamentals, Fruit, Vegetables, and Rights-of-Way; each is a separate exam. Because your entire range of pesticide use must be covered by the categories on the applicator's license, this could mean taking several exams. Also, consider having several gardeners licensed as applicators. If one applicator is out of town or not available, the operator/s may not legally apply pesticides. You must be in daily contact with each other. In essence, the applicator must be able to arrive at the scene in a timely fashion should an accident occur.

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What's this going to cost?

There is no charge to take any exam but there is a proctoring service fee for online testing. Study materials, training clinics, and online training courses offered by University of Illinois Extension for a fee can aid in passing the exams. There are fees for the actual license. For more information, please visit www.pesticidesafety.illinois.edu or call 800-644-2123.

Testing is available in Springfield at the Illinois Department of Agriculture's building (800-641-3934 or 217-785-2427) or their Dekalb office (815-787-5476). You must call ahead to arrange for an appointment to take any exam. Testing is also offered online and at training clinics. Testing is required every 3 years. There is a license fee of approximately \$30-60, depending on license type, for the actual license. Licenses cover a three year period. The costs of applying without a license are much greater: expensive fines, potential risks to your health and the environment, tarnished reputation for you and your organization, and mistrust from the ones you are feeding. Get licensed and demonstrate that you know how to handle and apply pesticides safely.

Commercial License Categories

This can appear complicated because it depends on what areas or crops you are applying the pesticide. Depending on how the garden is configured, the Applicator may need more than one category.

Vegetable/Fruit Gardens

These areas fall under the Fruit or Vegetable categories. The Applicator would need to pass the General Standards test and either the Fruit or Vegetable Category test, whichever applies.

Grassy Area around the Garden

These areas fall under the Turfgrass category. The Applicator would need to pass the General Standards test and the Turfgrass Category test. Flagging (posting) that a pesticide application has occurred is required by Illinois law.

Flower Garden, Native Prairie Garden or Ornamentals

These areas fall under the Ornamentals category. The Applicator would need to pass the General Standards test and the Ornamentals Category test.

Sidewalks, Playgrounds, Parking Lots, Walking Paths

These areas fall under the Rights-of-Way category. The Applicator would need to pass the General Standards test and the Rights-of-Way category test.

Safety in the Garden

Pesticides used within an Integrated Pest Management Program can be an important tool for pest control. Caution should be used anytime pesticides are applied to produce being consumed by others, particularly produce donated for programs such as "Plant-a-Row". It is always wise to check with your insurance company to determine the right coverage for the activities occurring in the garden. Currently, flagging (posting) an area treated with a pesticide is only required for lawns, but is a good idea for any public garden.

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Community Garden Policies

Those working in Community Gardens are encouraged to review their lease agreements to address pesticide applications. Lessors managing their garden plots can apply GUP pesticides to their plots. However, issues of pesticide drift onto neighboring plots or runoff from one plot to another can occur if applications are not made correctly. Some Community Gardens have a licensed Applicator make all pesticide applications within the entire garden.

For further information

Contact the Illinois Dept. of Agriculture for questions concerning testing and licensing or check out their website at <https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/agr/Pesticides/Pages/Certification-and-Licensing.aspx>.

Study materials are recommended and can be ordered by calling the University of Illinois Pesticide Safety Education Program office at 800-644-2123 or 217-244-2123. To learn more about study options, license categories and requirements, go to www.pesticidesafety.illinois.edu and click on “Training and Testing.”



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