



# Be a friend to WILDLIFE



It takes effort to make our yards and gardens beautiful. To ensure those efforts don't backfire, avoid pesticides.

That's how you'll create an urban oasis instead of a hazard zone.

For city dwellers, nature can sometimes feel like a nuisance: thriving by the roadside, on driveways and in our yards are not pretty flowers and colorful butterflies but tough weeds and annoying bugs. The species we like the least are often best adapted to our urban environment.

It takes effort to make yards and gardens beautiful. A

constant struggle against "weeds" and insect "pests" means spraying garden plants and treating soil with harmful chemicals.

But most bugs are our friends: they pollinate plants, improve the soil, and feed the birds. And weeds are simply plants that grow where we don't want them.

In fact, it's pesticides that are our enemies.

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## Pesticides Harm People and Animals

Pesticides are poisons. They are among the most hazardous chemicals we use in and around our homes. What makes them toxic to weeds, insects and other critters also makes them toxic to humans and pets.

### Toxic products to avoid:

- Insecticidal sprays are pesticides designed to kill insects; herbicides are pesticides designed to kill weeds. Some products combine them.
- Synthetic chemical fertilizers, designed to feed plants fast, can also be toxic.
- Stay away from any products that contain hazardous chemicals, including glyphosate, organophosphates, neonicotinoides (neonics) and 2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4-D).
- These chemicals are either neurotoxins or possible carcinogens. Neonics are a known bee killer.

### The top five reasons to avoid pesticides:

- 1. Threat to human health:** Pesticides collect in our bodies and are especially harmful to children, who are more vulnerable to toxins, even in very small amounts.
- 2. Threat to pet health:** Many pesticides are toxic to dogs and cats. Dogs walking on lawns or treated soil may pick up pesticides on their paws and then ingest them through licking.
- 3. Toxic to birds and bees:** Most insecticides are toxic to bees and other pollinators, and some are toxic to birds.
- 4. Water pollution:** Pesticides and fertilizers leach into the soil and groundwater or run off into storm drains and waterways. This harms our environment, including fish and birds.
- 5. Pesticides can backfire:** Pesticides also kill insects that eat unwanted bugs, and they remove food sources for birds. With their natural predators gone, unwanted bugs will multiply.

## ACTION TIPS

Be a friend to wildlife: Here's how you can go chemical-free.

### TIP #1

#### Choose the right plant for the right place

- *Identify the problem:* The cause of ailing plants may not be bugs but soil, light, or water. Plants in the high desert can easily get stressed due to inconsistent watering, high heat and drying winds, and weak plants may attract unwanted bugs.
- *Choose native plants:* plant a variety of native species to increase resilience and attract more beneficial insects.
- *Be water-wise:* use plants with low water needs and replace high-maintenance lawns with native wildflowers. Collect and water with rainwater – plants will grow better!
- *Build healthy soil:* use compost to improve soil and mulch to keep water in and suppress weeds. If you have disturbed or bare soil, plant ground cover with native species.
- *Buy organic plants or grow from seed:* avoid bringing plants into your garden that were sprayed at the nursery and are less robust.

### TIP #2

#### Control unwanted bugs naturally

- *Grow plants that deter unwanted bugs:* plants of the allium family (onions, chives, garlic, and leeks), as well as mint, cilantro, and lavender repel unwanted bugs, such as aphids, spider mites, and flies.
- *Grow flowering plants that attract beneficial bugs, pollinators, and birds.* Ask your local plant nursery about native plants that may be good for your space.
- *Give nature time to work:* Natural predators often bring unwanted bugs under control, but they need time to work. Plants that are otherwise healthy may outgrow the problem.
- *Tolerate some unwanted bugs:* Without the less appealing bugs, we wouldn't have pollinators and birds either. Aphids, for example, are the basis for many food chains in our gardens. A diverse insect population is necessary for a balanced garden where different wildlife species keep each other in check.

### TIP #3

#### Use non-chemical, least-hazardous methods

- If you're not ready to stop spraying, use non-chemical alternatives like organic soap or oil-based sprays.
- Apply these in the early morning or evening, as they may still harm pollinators.
- A water-only spray will help push off aphids and spider mites; they don't like getting wet.

### TIP #4

#### Use a little elbow grease

- Hand-pull weeds before they go to seed.
- Use long-handled weed pullers that easily pop out deep-rooted weeds.

## NEED HELP?

Ask the City not to spray pesticides near your property: *call 311* and request to be added to the "No Spray List."

If you, your child, or your pet have been exposed to pesticides, get advice at [poisonhelp.org](http://poisonhelp.org)

Certify your space as a backyard refuge and get advice on going chemical-free: [ABQbackyardrefuge.org](http://ABQbackyardrefuge.org)

For more information on coexisting with our Albuquerque wildlife, visit [cabq.gov/coexistwithwildlife](http://cabq.gov/coexistwithwildlife)