

IPM Lawn, Garden Workshop Held

CAMP HILL (Cumberland Co.) — For years, farmers have complained they get an unfair share of the blame for the conditions that exist in the Chesapeake Bay.

In an attempt to respond to these complaints and to educate the general public, the Keystone Chapter of the Soil And Water Conservation Society, along with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, The Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, the Governor Pinchot Group of the Sierra Club, and the Lancaster County Conservation District cosponsored an IPM-low impact workshop on lawn and garden management aimed at the urban homeowner.

An abbreviated session was held the evening of September 1 in conjunction with the regular meeting of the Sierra Club in Camp Hill. An in-depth session followed the next

day from 9 a.m. to 1:15 p.m. at the Farm and Home Center in Lancaster.

Billy Mills, bayscapes director, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, Richmond, Va., lead off with an analysis of the Bay and why it is so sensitive to land management in its tributary watersheds. He stated the Susquehanna contributes 50-percent of the water to a Bay which is 200 miles long, 30 miles wide, and only an average of 30 feet deep. His analogy compared the ratio of length to width to depth and found that all things being equal, the depth would only be the width of three dimes.

Mills pointed out that farmers have many incentives to use pesticides correctly, including the facts that they are the first to feel the effects of mis-use in their health, their water supplies, and their pocketbooks. Urbanites,

on the other hand, have no "accounting system" which forces them to be economic in their use of pest control products. Most want to see instant results from their pesticide applications, they don't read or follow the label, tend to follow the axiom "if a little is good, more is better." These attitudes lead to problems for the bay and the consumer.

He outlined several ways for urbanites to help improve the bay through the use of sound landscape practices such as fall fertilization; use of pest-resistant, drought-tolerant landscape species; and use of mulches, cover crops, dwarf fruit trees, etc. Soil testing was strongly recommended to prevent overapplication of fertilizers and lime.

Next on the program was Phil Catron, founding partner of "Naturalawn" lawn care service. Phil stated his company was founded

in response to the public's desire for alternatives to pesticide and fertilizer intensive lawn and garden systems. When he and his partner founded the company in 1986, they were looked upon as mavericks in the industry. As a measure of the public's acceptance of this approach, these "mavericks" now have 26 locations in 14 states.

"The 'perfect lawn' doesn't exist!" said Catron. "All lawns have weed, insect, and disease pressures, and the more we try to overcome them, the more problems we have — the more it costs us economically and environmentally."

The secret of success is to understand the biology of the lawn and garden system and try to come to a good balance. We can live with some pests and some weeds. He emphasized identifying and solving lawn and garden "problems" and not to be lulled into treating "symptoms." Many times we try to force something to grow where it is not adapted due to natural soil or site conditions. This wastes time, money, and resources, and leads to frustration. Instead, he suggested looking for alternative plant covers that are adapted to that location. This adds to the diversity and interest to the landscape and reduces costs.

He also emphasized soil testing, stressing that pH is a factor many times overlooked in the urban landscape. Proper pH balances natural systems and allows them to operate more efficiently. Many times we are so intent on modifying natural systems that we destroy the benefit that they provide us at no charge.

Dr. Lee Hellman, entomologist and turf-grass specialist, University of Maryland, College Park, wound up the program with a presentation on the integrated pest management (IPM) system of lawn care. He pointed out that 80-percent of the pesticides are applied to just 10 weeds. He discussed the importance of scouting your lawn on a regular basis to know what is going on and whether treatment is necessary.

He also emphasized the importance of records in managing your lawn, asking questions such as "How are you going to know what is going on today if you have no reference to compare to what went on last week? Is the situation getting better or worse? What did you treat with last year? Was it successful? Were the weather conditions the same? Was the level of control satisfactory?"

Hellman discussed a wide range of topics, including the importance of using resistant varieties of grass, diversity of plant covers in the landscape, beneficial insects, fertility practices, mowing height, sharpness of mower knives, drought resistant plant covers, etc.

The interest of workshop attendees was such that the session ran one and one half hours over the allotted time.

Sponsors are considering presenting the program in several other locations across Pennsylvania next February and March to educate other urbanites on the lawn and garden alternatives available and their role in the improvement of water quality and the environment.

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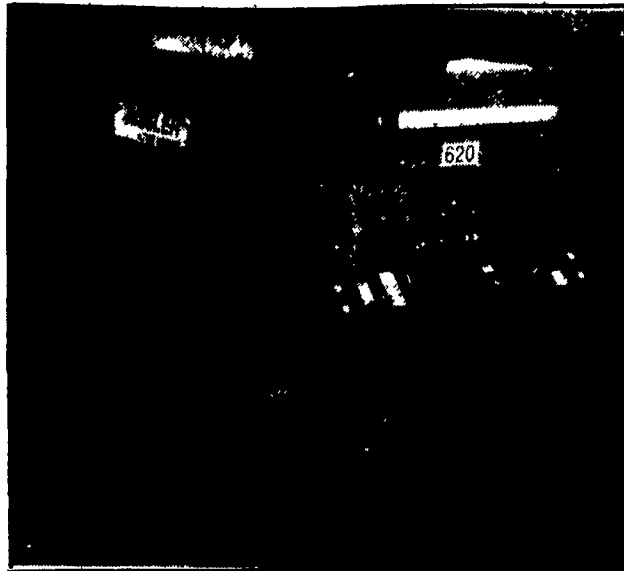
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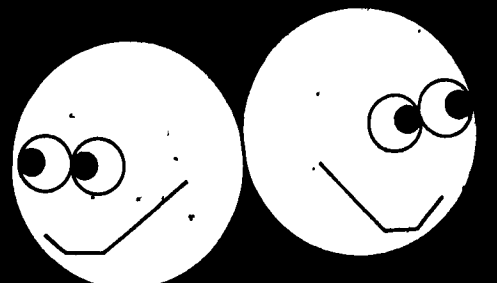
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