

# Why Not Go Green?

## Organic Herbicides Provide Viable Solutions

Paradigms live in a garden of sorts. Competing elements, some desired, others not so much, struggle to survive in a system of natural selection. Similarly, while gardeners may dream of heirloom tomatoes and blue-ribbon roses, we all must face weeds along the way. But, when dealing with these persistent pests, how should we proceed? The question is more germane today than ever.

Since WWII, consumer ads have preached better things for better living through chemistry. In fact, DuPont adopted the very phrase as its corporate mantra in 1939. After over half-a-century, the commercial thrust behind the use of chemical pesticides has seemingly obliterated the possibility of alternatives. To many home gardeners, the use of chemicals seems the only viable option in pesticide use. In fact, it is not.

The Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) lists four organic herbicides, AllDown Green Chemistry, Ground Force, Matran 2 and Express, as safe alternative herbicides for use with organic crops.

AllDown, manufactured by Summerset Products and Ground Force by Abby Laboratories are non-selective (meaning they will kill both broadleaf plants and grasses) herbicides containing high concentrations of vinegar, garlic and other organic ingredients. Ecosmart, which produces Matran 2, lists clove oil as the active ingredient in their organic herbicide, while BioFumetrics lists clove oil as well as thyme.

While it sounds like they belong on a salad, the manufacturers claim these natural amalgamations can safely exterminate weeds within hours, especially when applied on a warm, sunny day.

Some of the weeds included on a list of plants effectively controlled by AllDown and Ground Force are: bindweed, common burdock, Canadian thistle, dandelion, common lambsquarters, common ragweed, chickweed, leafy spurge, mouse-ear chickweed and

smooth pigweed. Matran 2's list of controlled weeds includes most of those just listed except bindweed and leafy spurge.

The Boulder County Weed Project (BCWP) is currently considering using AllDown, (distributed locally by Biological Solutions in Lyons, CO), and other organic products if requested to do so by its clients. "The practical basis is one of our main concerns," says Tim DiAmato of the BCWP. "If a client is adverse to chemical use, we want to do all that we can to provide alternatives. AllDown has us excited."

So, why don't more people go green? Simply because no one knows.

In the sixties, the alarming level of chemical pesticide use in this country led scientist and best-selling author Rachel Carson to describe, in her book *Silent Spring*, "a rain of chemicals" bound to destroy the earth if not stopped. As some argue, Carson sprouted what has blossomed into today's environmental movement. Perhaps in response to the nascent social desire for a shift away from the stubborn adherence to the use of chemicals, DuPont dropped chemistry from its mantra in the eighties and ultimately changed its corporate slogan to "Miracles through Science."

However, the movement for which Carson and others fought over forty years ago has not fully matured. The influence of over fifty years of market advertising on behalf of chemical pesticides has

deprived the modern gardener of sufficient knowledge about non-toxic alternatives.

A paradigm shift must occur in order for organic herbicides to survive and benefit our communities. Rick Allen of Biological Solutions insists, "People don't buy organic herbicides because for fifty years they've been told to pursue 'a better life through chemistry.' Now, we are trying to shift that paradigm in order to promote 'a better life through microbiology.'"

Though optimistic regarding the potential benefits of using organic herbicides as a safe alternative to weed control, DiAmato of the BCWP, also remains concerned about community awareness: "Even if there are alternative products out there that work, people aren't always aware of them."

Connie Smith, manager of Sturtz and Copeland Greenhouses in Boulder, agrees with DiAmato, "Customers are not coming in and immediately asking for organic products by name. In fact, not

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enough people even know they exist. Most people just come in with a desperate look on their face, not wanting to use chemicals, but not knowing the viable alternatives".

Although Smith personally endorses the use of organic products reviewed by OMRI, she can imagine why such products may be frustrating for some people who are accustomed to using chemicals. Though effective, in some cases the organic herbicides require a second application to get rid of some obstinate perennials.

Smith and her customers, however, exemplify the education and persistence necessary for organic herbicides to succeed as a safe alternative to weed control. "Everyone is just so glad to learn that there are viable alternatives out there."

*Mike Kolakowski is an environmental journalist in Boulder.*