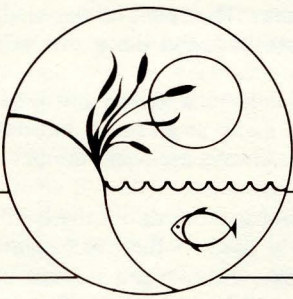


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MASTERING THE ORGANIC GARDEN

I would love to see the Master Gardener program of the Cooperative Extension Service System provide more encouragement to organic gardeners. Often they are only tolerated. Master Gardeners who are organic-minded are allowed to tell people how to avoid using pesticides and other poisons, but only if they also give the official state university recommendation—which almost always calls for use of poisons against pests.

Unfortunately, many gardeners still want to use toxic chemicals against garden bugs. They have the desire to dominate nature rather than live happily within a benign natural environment. So they often use toxic sprays, rather than the numerous safe, biological methods that could be just as effective—or more effective.

County agents and the Extension Master Gardeners could change that. But the state universities would have to change from the prevailing spray-and-pray mentality to the use of biological and organic methods for gardening.

Organic gardeners have shown that it's possible to have pleasant and productive gardens in every part of this country without using toxic chemicals. They make their home grounds an island of purity instead of a place that is poisoned regularly. Yet the organic idea isn't spreading fast enough, because far too many state university horticulturists and entomologists are still hooked on the old poison-first mentality.

Why do the universities do that? One important reason is that they are paid to become centers of poison technology. The makers of poisons provide money to the researchers at the land-grant universities. They cover some of the cost of studying pest problems. And those grants have continued for so many years that the idea that poisons are essential to insect, disease and weed control has become deeply entrenched in the culture of the universities.

But what about academic freedom? We know that all kinds of ideas are welcome at a true university. The Extension Service can't turn the idea of academic freedom on its head and say just the opposite—that because of the university and its ideas a diverse expression of views by private citizens who are not paid is prohibited.

Of course that can't be done, but it's exactly what the Extension Service is doing. And they say the law requires them to do it. Master Gardeners must give the official Extension Service line when asked for advice because of "legal matters involving liability," I was told by Ricardo Gomez, who is staff leader of the project in Washington.

The implication is that if county agents or Master Gardeners say what they think to be true rather than what the local university tells them is the truth, they or the government will be sued. I say that's nonsense. What's far more likely is that the Extension Service, the universities and their agents will be sued for causing pollution. There is evidence all around

us that the poison approach to insect, disease and weed control is creating vast environmental damage. My guess is that no jury anywhere would find against a person or organization trying to stop that poisoning. Just the opposite! They would be honored, which is just what we are setting out to do with our own new Master Gardener program.

*Robert Rodale
Organic Gardening, 11/86*

P.S. AMEN, Robert, ALTER uses no poisons

ROSEY RED APPLES

Safeway, the nation's biggest supermarket chain, announced in July that it will no longer sell apples treated with daminozide, a chemical found to produce cancer in laboratory animals. Starting with this fall's apple crop, apple sauce and apple juice sold under Safeway's house names will not contain daminozide either. Two other supermarket chains—Giant Foods and Kroger—quickly followed suit.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), was weak-kneed by contrast. After proposing a ban on daminozide in August 1985, EPA decided to follow the advice of its science advisory board, which argued that more studies were needed.

Daminozide, manufactured by Uniroyal under the trade name Alar, is applied to apples (and other fruit crops) at harvest time to extend shelf-life and enhance the apple's redness.

*Rose Marie Audette
Environmental Action, Sept./Oct. 1986*

WALTER ALTER: our 'correspondent in the field' says:

"Found a good line in *The Postman* the other day — it goes like this: 'You know, I've found that the big causes don't love you back — They take and take but never give in return. So now I fight for the little — the tangible things — my family, my farm . . .'"

