

# CCE-PSEP Pesticide Education Fact Sheet: **How to Select a Pesticide Product**

You've decided you need a [pesticide](#) to manage a pest. When you go to your local hardware store, you are overwhelmed by the variety of brand names, liquids, granules, dusts, and container sizes and types. So...

...Which product should you buy?

Although a lot goes into that decision, the two most important pieces of information are:

① **The positive identification of the pest.** Each pesticide is designed to control certain pests. Thus, a pesticide that controls one type of weed or household insect may not control another type. Contact your [county Cooperative Extension office](#) for help identifying a pest.

② **The pesticide label.** The product label tells you where, how, when, and against what pest to use it as well as what precautions to take. You may use a pesticide only as directed by the label. For example, if you want to control cluster flies, the label must either list them by name or allow use against all flies.

*Always read and follow the label when applying a pesticide. The label is the law.*

This factsheet is adapted from the UW-Madison Pesticide Applicator Training program's Home PEST brochure #11 "How to Select a Pesticide."

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**Cornell Cooperative Extension**  
Pesticide Safety Education Program

## STEP 1:

**Do NOT buy a product unless you answer "YES" to ALL of these questions:**

**Is the target pest listed on the label for the site of application (e.g., indoors, lawn, garden)?** If the product only says it can be used to control ants outdoors, you can't use it for ants indoors.

**Will the pesticide control the right life stage of the pest?** Some herbicides prevent new weed growth, while others kill only existing weeds.

**Can you apply the pesticide when you need it?** Many pesticides can't be applied to food plants within a few days before harvest.

**Are you willing and able to abide by any application restrictions?** You might have to stay out of the treated area for a specified time.

**Do you have, or will you buy, the application equipment and protective clothing (e.g., chemical-resistant gloves) required by the label?**

**Is the product practical to use?** A ready-to-use pump bottle is useful for spraying weeds in sidewalk cracks, but not over a large area.

**Did you read the entire pesticide label?**

## STEP 2:

**To choose between products that pass Step 1, consider things such as which product:**

**Poses the least risk to people.** Risk is the likelihood of harm and depends on both the **toxicity** of the pesticide and your level of **exposure** to it. Thus, "least toxic" is not the same as "least risk."

**Is less toxic to people.** The signal word on the front of the label tells you the pesticide's relative toxicity:

SIGNAL WORD	TOXICITY
Danger	Highly Toxic
Warning	Moderately Toxic
Caution	Slightly Toxic
None	Least Toxic

**Presents less chance of exposure.** Ant baits reduce exposure compared to aerosol sprays. Ready-to-use products are pre-mixed, thus reducing exposure.

**Is less likely to harm desirable organisms.** The label will list any hazards to pets, birds, nearby plants, or pollinators and steps to avoid harm.

**Works for the desired length of time.** Mosquito repellents differ in how long they will protect you from being bitten. The product label will often tell you how many hours of protection you can expect.

**You can buy in a reasonable amount.** Buying more product than you need wastes money, plus you assume the risks of storing and disposing of it.

**Has an EPA Registration Number (EPA Reg. No.) on the label.** Only pesticides [registered](#) by the EPA have undergone rigorous efficacy and safety testing.

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