



Pesticides: Topical & Chemical Fact Sheets

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Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Principles

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1. What is IPM?

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is an effective and environmentally sensitive approach to pest management that relies on a combination of common-sense practices. IPM programs use current, comprehensive information on the life cycles of pests and their interaction with the environment. This information, in combination with available pest control methods, is used to manage pest damage by the most economical means, and with the least possible hazard to people, property, and the environment.

The IPM approach can be applied to both agricultural and non-agricultural settings, such as the home, garden, and workplace. IPM takes advantage of all appropriate pest management options including, but not limited to, the judicious use of pesticides. In contrast, *organic* food production applies many of the same concepts as IPM but limits the use of pesticides to those that are produced from natural sources, as opposed to synthetic chemicals.

2. How do IPM programs work?

IPM is not a single pest control method but, rather, a series of pest management evaluations, decisions and controls. In practicing IPM, growers who are aware of the potential for pest infestation follow a four-tiered approach. The four steps include:

- **Set Action Thresholds**

Before taking any pest control action, IPM first sets an action threshold, a point at which pest populations or environmental conditions indicate that pest control action must be taken. Sighting a single pest does not always mean control is needed. The level at which pests will either become an economic threat is critical to guide future pest control decisions.

- **Monitor and Identify Pests**

Not all insects, weeds, and other living organisms require control. Many organisms are innocuous, and some are even beneficial. IPM programs work to monitor for pests and identify them accurately, so that appropriate control decisions can be made in conjunction with action thresholds. This monitoring and identification removes the possibility that pesticides will be used when they are not really needed or that the wrong kind of pesticide will be used.

- **Prevention**

As a first line of pest control, IPM programs work to manage the crop, lawn, or indoor space to prevent pests from becoming a threat. In an agricultural crop, this may mean using cultural methods, such as rotating between different crops, selecting pest-resistant varieties, and planting pest-free rootstock. These control methods can be very effective

and cost-efficient and present little to no risk to people or the environment.

- **Control**

Once monitoring, identification, and action thresholds indicate that pest control is required, and preventive methods are no longer effective or available, IPM programs then evaluate the proper control method both for effectiveness and risk. Effective, less *risky* pest controls are chosen first, including highly targeted chemicals, such as pheromones to disrupt pest mating, or mechanical control, such as trapping or weeding. If further monitoring, identifications and action thresholds indicate that less risky controls are not working, then additional pest control methods would be employed, such as targeted spraying of pesticides. Broadcast spraying of non-specific pesticides is a last resort.

3. Do most growers use IPM?

With these steps, IPM is best described as a continuum. Many, if not most, agricultural growers identify their pests before spraying. A smaller subset of growers use less risky pesticides such as pheromones. All of these growers are on the IPM continuum. The goal is to move growers further along the continuum to using all appropriate IPM techniques.

4. How do you know if the food you buy is grown using IPM?

In most cases, food grown using IPM practices is not identified in the marketplace like *organic* food. There is no national certification for growers using IPM, as the United States Department of Agriculture has developed for organic foods. Since IPM is a complex pest control process, not merely a series of practices, it is impossible to use one IPM definition for all foods and all areas of the country. Many individual commodity growers, for such crop as potatoes and strawberries, are working to define what IPM means for their crop and region, and IPM-labeled foods are available in limited areas. With definitions, growers could begin to market more of their products as *IPM-Grown*, giving consumers another choice in their food purchases.

5. If I grow my own fruits and vegetables, can I practice IPM in my garden?

Yes, the same principles used by large farms can be applied to your own garden by following the four-tiered approach outlined above. For more specific information on practicing IPM in your garden, you can contact your state Extension Services for the services of a Master Gardener.

6. For More Information on IPM

- [Pesticides and Food: What "Integrated Pest Management" Means](#)
- EPA is encouraging the innovation of [biological pesticides](#), also known as biopesticides.
- Find [your state's Extension Service](#) [EXIT Disclaimer](#)
- [Pesticide Environmental Stewardship Program \(PESP\)](#)
- Radcliffe's [IPM World Textbook](#) [EXIT Disclaimer](#)
- [IPMNet](#) [EXIT Disclaimer](#)