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Household pesticides could double risk of childhood leukaemia

New research published in a top scientific journal links the use of household pesticides with childhood leukaemia.

French doctors compared 280 children with acute leukaemia with 288 healthy children of the same age. Interviews revealed that children whose mothers had used insecticides in the home while pregnant and after birth were twice as likely to develop leukaemia. Both garden insecticides/fungicides, and insecticidal head lice treatments were implicated. The team were not able to establish which specific insecticides were responsible.

While this research does provide absolute proof, the lead researcher, Florence Menegaux suggested that 'preventative action' should be considered.

It is possible to garden and manage indoor pests without using synthetic chemicals. Head lice can also be combatted without using insecticides (contact Community Hygiene Concern on 020 7686 4321 for details of their 'bug busting kit', www.chc.org).

Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 2006; vol 63: 131-134. F. Menegaux, A. Baruchel, Y. Bertrand, B. Lescoeur, G. Leverger, B. Nelken, D. Sommelet, D. Hemon, J. Clavel.

Winter is almost over

These tips provide guidance on times for planting, sowing, harvesting and other tasks. Each month highlights a different pest/disease, non-chemical methods of control, and relevant news and information.

VEGETABLES

These are sowing/planting times for the South of England. Growers living further north should delay for 2-4 weeks. If a hard frost is forecast soil can be covered with horticultural fleece to protect germinating seeds.

SOW OUTDOORS

- * Broad beans
- * Parsnip
- * Onion (from seed)
- * Peas (for May/June crop) suitable varieties: Feltham First; Meteor

SOW UNDER COVER

- * Summer cabbage, e.g. varieties Greyhound, Hispi, Primo, Derby Day, Stonehead, Minicole, Winnigstadt
- * Radish (summer varieties)
- * Lettuce
- * Rocket
- * Spinach
- * Early turnip e.g. purple top milan

SOW UNDER HEATED COVER

- * Aubergine (for a greenhouse crop)
- * Pepper (for a greenhouse crop)

PLANT OUTDOORS

- * Jerusalem artichoke tubers
- * Shallots

PREPARATION

Start chitting early potato varieties in preparation for planting in late March/early April. Individual tubers can be placed in egg cartons (or similar) in a cool place under indirect light.

HARVEST

Jerusalem artichoke, perpetual spinach (leaf beet), early purple sprouting broccoli, brussels sprouts, celeriac, celery, chicory, endive, kale, leeks, parsnip, radish, salsify, scorzonera, spinach, swede, turnip.

FRUIT

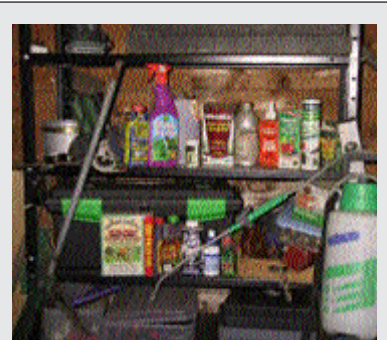
- * Finish planting fruit trees and bushes (raspberries and other cane fruits).
- * Finish pruning apple and pear trees.
- * Shorten sideshoots on red and white currants to just one bud and remove old stems crowding the centre of the bush.
- * Prune gooseberries.



- * Protect blooms on early flowering fruit trees - peaches, nectarines, apricots - with horticultural fleece or similar.
- * For an early rhubarb crop force a few crowns by covering with buckets. Place straw/compost over the buckets for added heat.

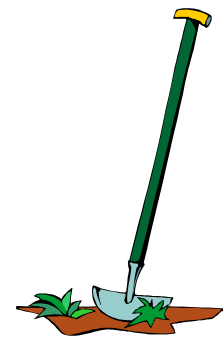
GENERAL TASKS

- * Remove any volunteer potatoes to keep plot free from blight.
- * Start harvesting green manure crops when the soil is ready to dig. Young lush growth can be chopped up and incorporated into the soil to break down for a few weeks before planting. More mature crops should be composted first.
- * Soil can be warmed up by covering it with plastic sheeting or with cloches a couple of weeks before sowing.
- * Wash down the greenhouse roof and sides to remove grime.
- * Clean out gutters.
- * Clean and sterilise pots and trays.
- * Collect plastic water bottles to make mini-cloches.
- * Order seeds and other supplies.
- * Make 5in square mats to place around cabbage shoots to protect from cabbage root fly - cardboard or carpet works well. Make these now so they are ready when you need them later in the season.
- * Provide some food for the birds.
- * Plan your planting scheme for the year ideally organised around a 4-year rotation.
- * Prepare potato bed by forking in compost or rotted manure. If soil is too wet cover with plastic for a few days to keep rain off.
- * Top-dress perennial or over-wintering crops with compost.



Do you have any stored pesticides?

Did you know that disposing of old pesticides in bins or down drains can pollute land and water. Most local councils offer a service for safe disposal of old pesticides and other chemicals. Find out what facilities are available near you at: www.pesticidedisposal.org or call your council.



BOTRYTIS

Botrytis (or grey mould) appears as a fungal growth on affected plants. Symptoms include a brown-grey discolouration, and a fuzzy grey mould. Although it can be caused by several species the most frequent is *Botrytis cinerea*. *Botrytis cinerea* is extremely common and can survive on most living and dead plant material. Its spores are almost always present in the air.

Growth of the mould is favoured by cool moist conditions with little or no wind. Cool, damp, poorly ventilated greenhouses are ideal. It is common in cool spring and autumn weather when greenhouse vents are closed at night to retain heat. Outdoors it can occur after extended periods of overcast weather, fogs, light drizzle or heavy dews. The spores or conidia of the fungus can spread in the air or through rainsplash.

It affects many varieties of fruit and vegetables and usually attacks through wounds, weakened tissue, or damaged areas. It mainly causes blossom blights and fruit rots but can also affect other parts of plants, causing stem cankers and rots, bud rot, leaf spots or blights, bulb rots and tuber or root rots. Botrytis is also one of several fungi which can cause damping off, a disease of seedlings whereby the bases of their stems darken and thin just above the soil causing them to fall over.

Although Botrytis is common in the soil infection can be prevented by good management techniques.

- ◆ Remove dead and injured parts of plants before they can become infected.
- ◆ Don't leave plant debris lying around - compost it immediately.
- ◆ Carry out regular inspections in the greenhouse, removing infected plant parts immediately and cutting back to healthy growth. Such inspections should not be carried out while plants are wet as this would favour further spread of the disease. Burn infected plant parts or remove them from the site carefully washing hands or tools that have come into contact with the infected plant material.
- ◆ Don't overwater greenhouse plants particularly seedlings.
- ◆ Avoid overhead watering, rather water around the base of plants.
- ◆ Allow plenty of space between plants and seedlings to promote rapid drying of plants.



Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK) is an independent non-profit organisation working nationally and globally with individuals and organisations who share our concerns. PAN UK projects enable us to work effectively towards specific targets to enable us to:

- ◆ Eliminate the hazards of pesticides
- ◆ Reduce dependence on pesticides
- ◆ Promote alternatives to pesticides

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