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My & Others' Experience With Nematodes for Insect Control. Part Two by Art Drysdale

by **Art Drysdale**

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Art Drysdale, a life-long resident of Toronto and a horticulturist well known all across Canada, is now a resident of Parksville, British Columbia on Vancouver Island, just north of Nanaimo. He has renovated an old home and has a new garden there. His radio gardening vignettes are heard in south-western Ontario over two radio stations: Easy 101 FM out of Tillsonburg at 2 PM weekdays and CD98.9 FM out of Norfolk County at 11:40 AM weekdays.

Art also has his own website at <http://www.artdrysdale.com>



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Over the past two decades at least, each time I speak at an exposition, such as Canada Blooms, inevitably there will be a question about nematodes, and I respond with much the same response as I included in last week's article here. This has happened to me from Ottawa, throughout Ontario, and all the way through Saskatchewan to British Columbia.

Often that response will lead to an exhibitor at the same show coming to me after the talk, often with a container of his nematode product, to tell me literally that I don't know what I'm talking about. I then have to go into a long explanation of why the nematodes do not work, and why I do not recommend them. Often, of course, they go off in a huff not really wanting to hear what I have said to them.

Currently, Nematodes have not been widely-adopted for use by the turf industry because of their high cost and because the environmental conditions necessary to guarantee the success of the Nematode treatments rarely exist. Throughout the balance of this part of the last two articles I shall quote generously from the material published on the Web by the Canadian group, Force of Nature.

Nematodes are sold in a dormant stage so that they survive storage and shipping. To apply, mix the Nematodes in water and apply them to the soil.

They can also be applied through irrigation systems.

Since products differ, always follow application instructions with the product.

They will settle out in spray tanks if not agitated properly. Also, they need a water film to reach their targets. When applying to soil to treat various pests, the soil must be moist, though not too wet.

Even though Nematodes can move to seek out insect pests, they cannot go very far (a few centimetres), and the nearer you can get them to the insect, the more likely they are to be able to infect that insect. Good coverage is essential.

After applying Nematodes onto the soil surface or turf, irrigate immediately. This helps wash the Nematodes down through the vegetation and into the soil. They are susceptible to ultraviolet light, so must be watered in to get them out of the sunlight.

Nematode insecticides will kill only up to 50 to 65 per cent of the

Above: Another shot of an Entomopathogenic nematode; and below, a typical Canadian package of nematodes for garden use



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damaging insect population.

Other Nematode species have been shown to provide ineffective control, with suppression levels as low as 25 to 40 per cent.

Some reports have indicated that, under ideal conditions, some Nematode insecticides can be as effective as some conventional insecticides.

The question that arises is which insecticides?

In fact, different conventional insecticides provide varying levels of control. Based upon the review of research reports and practical field experience, here is a summary of the expected product efficacy for the control of White Grubs:

imidacloprid (Merit) 75 to 85 per cent, preventive only, conventional insecticide

carbaryl (Sevin) 75 per cent, preventive or curative, conventional insecticide

diazinon (Basudin) 50 to 65 per cent, preventive or curative, conventional insecticide

chlorpyrifos (Dursban) 40 per cent, preventive or curative, conventional insecticide

entomopathogenic nematodes 25 to 65 per cent, preventive only, green alternative insecticide

According to Pamela Charbonneau, Turfgrass Specialist, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, in a Factsheet on 'Lawn Maintenance', "Apply beneficial nematodes for the marginal control of European Chafer and Japanese Beetle larvae". [The emphasis on marginal control is mine, but it important to note.]

Despite claims to the contrary, overall, there are no viable, efficacious, or economical green alternatives to replace conventional pest control products. Overall, green alternatives are a dismal failure since they merely suppress or inhibit pests of turf, and require an excessive number of repeat applications, often with extremely-high-inputs of active ingredient.

On the other hand, conventional pest control products fully and effectively control pests, without the need for excessive repeat applications, or without the use exorbitant quantities of active ingredient.

Virtually all Green Alternatives are bogus, displaying negative characteristics such as the following:

- Green Alternatives may be almost totally ineffective except under very specific circumstances
- Green Alternatives may be prohibited in some jurisdictions
- Green Alternatives may be questionably higher in toxicity
- Green Alternatives may be stunningly more expensive to use when compared to conventional pest control products
- Green Alternatives may be supplied by the same Environmental-Terror-Organizations that sought the prohibition of conventional pest control products
- Green Alternatives may have negative side-effects like phytotoxicity (an effect that adversely affects plant growth) or metal corrosion or rodent-attractant
- Green Alternatives may not be registered as pest control products, and therefore, are unregulated
- Green Alternatives may not have a full range of safety information such as human toxicity and environmental impact, which is necessary for the registration of all conventional pest control products

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- Green Alternatives may require extremely-high-inputs of active ingredient since they will otherwise be less effective
- Green Alternatives may require more personal protection for the user
- Green Alternatives may not be safer, not better, and not more effective.

In addition to all of this, Nematode Insecticides are not registered as pest control products in Canada. Neither the federal nor the provincial governments have officially scheduled or classified Nematode insecticides as a pest control product. However, Nematode insecticides are listed as alternative pest controls for turf by Guelph Turfgrass Institute of the University of Guelph and the Province of Ontario.

Consequently, there is no obligation on the part of the manufacturer to divulge a full range of safety information such as human toxicity and environmental impact, which is the case with conventional pest control products. This information will eventually be required, not just concerning the nematodes themselves, but also for the symbiotic bacteria that they carry.

It is inevitable that the failure to regulate nematode products will eventually create a public relations problem.

It will not be taken for granted for very long that an organism that is defined as *infective* will require the need for more safety information in order to justify its status as reduced-risk.

Additionally, the failure to regulate nematode products appears to be in direct contravention of the federal definition of a pest control product (or pesticide), as interpreted by the federal Pest Control Products Act.

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