York Conservation Commission

York River Watershed Grants Program – Project Summary Report

Provided to the York River Stewardship Committee

July 11, 2025

Project name:
Pesticide/fertilizer education for residents of York

Project summary:
The project was developed in response to a mandate in the latest York Comprehensive Plan (also in the York River Watershed Stewardship Plan) to consider "regulations to control and reduce use of pesticides and fertilizers in York." The Commission chose to pursue education regarding proper use of pesticide and fertilizer rather than regulation via town ordinance. Education was achieved through: 1) a brochure, mailed to all residents, urging the adoption of the principles and practices of Integrated Pest Management (IPM); and 2) a half-page piece, published in the Weekly Sentinel, extolling the advantages of "healthy yards".

Project tasks:
The brochure (to be mailed) was developed, with the assistance of a local graphic designer, to incorporate an Applicator's Checklist recommended by Maine Environmental Specialist Gary Fish, along with an explanation of the Comp Plan mandate and the concepts of Integrated Pest Management, including a brief statement of IPM principles.
An unexpected postage increase (after the grant budget was set) left insufficient funds for the planned follow-up postcard, so the Commission chose to use the Weekly Sentinel, a local weekly paper distributed to most York residents, to convey the concept of "healthy yards" (including limiting the need for fertilizer) via a half-page "ad".

Project outcomes or benefits:
The brochure was mailed in early April to all York residents (~7700). Feedback via direct comments as well as on the Commission's Facebook page was positive. Additional brochures (300) will be distributed in the community, e.g., at the Climate Action Fair. The "Healthy Yards in York" piece appeared in three editions of the Sentinel (biweekly in June/July).

Project budget:
Funds were used for brochure printing ($2054), postage ($1643), and the graphic designer ($815). The published piece required "ad" costs ($1195) and the graphic designer ($195).

Attachments:
Brochure on pesticide use (web version)
"Healthy Yards" ad

Pesticides are Poison...

Let's keep York's children, pets and wildlife safe, and our waters clean.

Think... BEFORE You Spray.

Pesticides, by their very nature, are designed to be toxic - that is poisonous - to one or more target pests. While they may control pests, they can endanger beneficial insects, birds, and other wildlife. Children and pets are particularly vulnerable to pesticides used on lawns as they run and play. Runoff resulting from heavy rain can carry pesticides into ponds, rivers, and the ocean, affecting fish and water fowl.

York residents are urged to learn how to eliminate, or greatly reduce, their use of pesticides. Maine state policy (Title 22, §1471-X) is to follow the principles and implementation of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) to minimize reliance on pesticides: 'Think First, Spray Last" (see it on maine.gov).

The latest York Comprehensive Plan, approved by town voters in 2022, and the York River Watershed Stewardship Plan both include a mandate to consider "regulations to control and reduce use of pesticides and fertilizers in York." The Town of York, particularly the Parks and Recreation Department, already successfully practices IPM; similar principles are applied to fertilizer use on areas managed by the department (testing the soil to know the what, why, and when of treatment options). The York Conservation Commission calls on all residents to understand and follow the IPM principles, in order to avoid the negative effects of pesticides and fertilizers. And if you employ a lawn care provider, ask them to do the same.

Submit comments at facebook.com/groups/yorkhealthyyardscommunity

Principles of Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

1. Identify the pest
2. Monitor and keep records; set action thresholds
3. Explore options: Mechanical – remove, repel, exclude Biological – choose pest-resistant plants
4. If pesticide is necessary, target specific pests and use least toxic (limit broadcast spray)

YORK RIVER
WILD & SCENIC

Funding for this brochure provided by the York River Stewardship Committee and the National Park Service Wild and Scenic Rivers Program.

Delay THE Spray or Just Say "No Way!"

The Applicator's Checklist

Avoiding use of a pesticide altogether is the most effective way to reduce health and environmental risks. Only consider using a pesticide when other avenues of control have failed. Maine Environmental Specialist Gary Fish recommends following this checklist before you apply.

Evaluate the situation

Determine exactly what pest is causing the problem. Local resources like Cooperative Extension or licensed pest control companies are available to assist with pest identification. Send samples or request an on-site visit. Without this knowledge, the right tool for control will be elusive.

Know the pest

With this knowledge, zero in on a susceptible stage of the pest. Application timing is critical. Control insects when they are small and more vulnerable. Don't attempt to control crabgrass late in the summer after the plant has produced thousands of seeds and has naturally begun to die.

Take measurements

Before you go to the garden center to make a purchase, know how much area needs treatment. Purchase only what is needed right now, this season. Stockpiling pesticides creates greater potential risks for families and the environment.

Choose products wisely

Look for products that are easy to handle such as granules and ready-to-use liquids. Concentrates require mixing, which can be risky business.

Read the entire label before purchasing

Be sure the plant and pest are listed on the label. Check the "days to harvest" section. If the "days to harvest" is 21 days and you'll be picking next week, don't buy that pesticide. Determine what application and personal protective equipment is required. Don't leave without all the needed equipment.

Follow instructions

Read the label to determine the proper mixing strength and how much mixture to apply over a given area. Never add a little extra for good measure. Some herbicides work better at lower concentrations because they enter the whole weed and kill the entire plant. Adding extra burns off the top of the weed and allows a new plant to grow back. Mix only what is needed. Practice with water ahead of time to be sure the right amount will be applied.

Look for sensitive sites

Check around the treatment area and remove toys, laundry, pet bowls or anything else that shouldn't be treated. Prevent water contamination. Stay away from wells, ledge, sandy soils and open water. Don't apply a pesticide to a bare slope or just before heavy rains are expected.

Watch the wind and temperature

Applying pesticides in high winds is a waste of time and money and could contaminate sensitive sites. Winds should be under five to eight miles per hour but not perfectly calm. Keep the spray close to the target and spray in the direction of the breeze. Don't apply when the temperature is greater than 65 degrees. Many pesticides are volatile and will not reach the intended target when used on hot days.

Spot treat

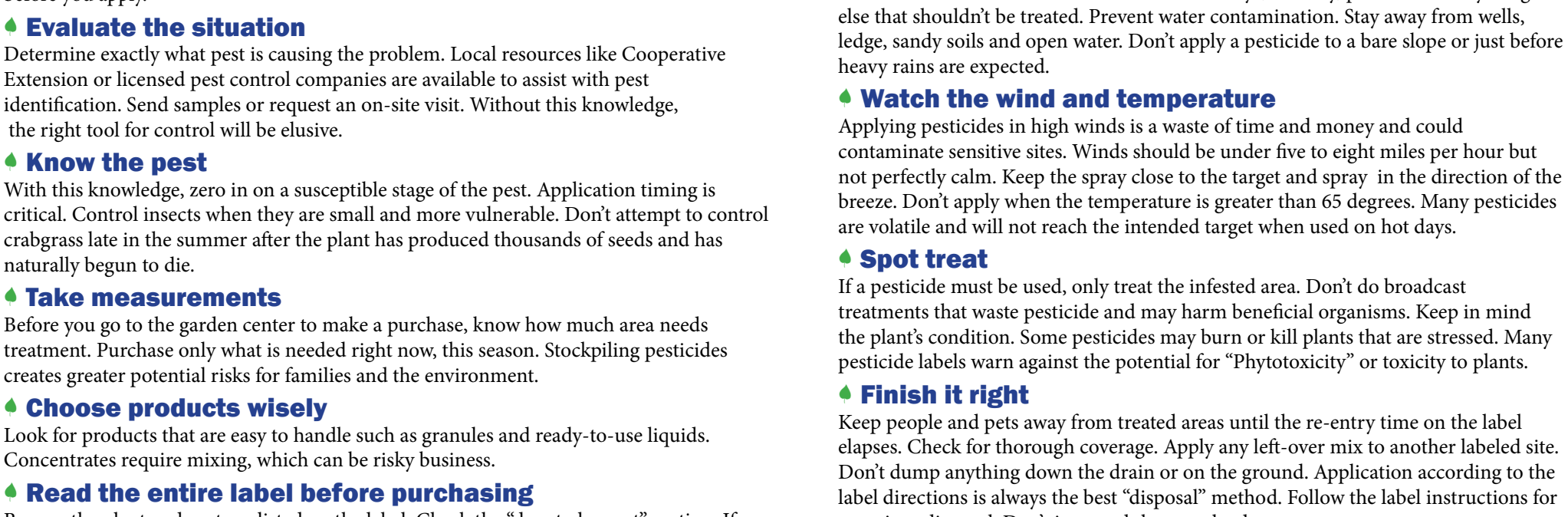
If a pesticide must be used, only treat the infested area. Don't do broadcast treatments that waste pesticide and may harm beneficial organisms. Keep in mind the plant's condition. Some pesticides may burn or kill plants that are stressed. Many pesticide labels warn against the potential for "Phytotoxicity" or toxicity to plants.

Finish it right

Keep people and pets away from treated areas until the re-entry time on the label elapses. Check for thorough coverage. Apply any left-over mix to another labeled site. Don't dump anything down the drain or on the ground. Application according to the label directions is always the best "disposal" method. Follow the label instructions for container disposal. Don't just send them to the dump.

Be patient and keep records

After treatment, wait long enough for the product to work. Some products may take up to two weeks before completely killing the pest. Repeating the treatment before then would be a waste and an unneeded addition of pesticide to the environment. If the treatment doesn't work, only repeat if the label allows re-treatment. Keep records of what was used and how well it worked. Records help you plan for the next application and prevent repeated mistakes.



Healthy Yards in York and Beyond

A naturally healthy yard requires:

… less water … less fertilizer … less pesticide... less maintenance

Mow High and Water Less

Mowing grass to about 4" helps shade out weeds and encourages root growth helping the lawn tolerate heat better and require less watering.

Mulch Grass and Leaves

Leaf blowers damage our yards and our health.
Leave grass clippings on the lawn and attach a leaf mulching blade to your mower in the fall to mulch leaves into the lawn.

Restrict Artificial Fertilizers

Runoff from chemical fertilizers causes great harm to our streams and ponds. Native plants, shrubs and trees rarely need fertilizers. Get a soil test before purchasing fertilizer. Then use only recommended amounts.

Restrict Pesticides /Herbicides

When pesticides are necessary, follow the principles and practices of Integrated Pest Management. For the safest protection against ticks, use tick bait boxes.

Learn More at: Facebook.com/groups/YorkHealthyYardsCommunity (York Conservation Commission)

Funding provided by the York River Stewardship Committee/National Park Service Wild and Scenic Rivers Program.