



Why pesticide free flowers and ornamental plants are so important!

In Europe, close to 400,000 tonnes of pesticides are sold annually¹ and used in many different areas. It is perhaps little known that in Luxembourg alone more than 500 pesticides are approved for use. Moreover, this represents only a fraction of the pesticides that are found here! Some of these pesticides are even used at home in private gardens, but many people are not aware of the dangers of these products. To explain, pesticides are a means of eliminating unwelcome organisms; they are essentially a poison to kill living creatures. Did you know that early pesticides were actually developed by modifying poisonous nerve gas materials used in military warfare!

The dangers from pesticides are far-reaching: they affect all life regardless of its purpose or value. This means that while pesticides may be applied by people to eliminate specific pests, these chemicals will unfortunately also harm other more beneficial creatures such as pretty butterflies and hard-working bees. In addition, these chemicals do not biodegrade or break down easily in nature; in fact, they can remain a long time in our air, water and earth. So simply by breathing in or by touch or by eating affected food, these chemicals can also be absorbed by the human body and possibly lead to acute poisoning or chronic illnesses². Moreover, as these chemical materials are very complex, they may lead to negative side effects that have not yet been researched. However, considering all that science *has* taught us about pesticides to date, it seems likely that there will be many more unpleasant discoveries yet.

Unfortunately, even the non-use of pesticide products in your own garden does not guarantee a healthy, safe environment. For instance, consider the many potted flowers and ornamental plants that are bought each year to enhance gardens and balconies at home. In 2014, Greenpeace and natur&ëmwelt took a sample of 10 popular selling plants sold in five different hardware stores and garden centres in Luxembourg³. Alarming results exposed that such plants are often loaded with pesticides! In fact, laboratory analysis revealed that 30 different pesticide residues were found; 8 of these were rated as being of particular concern to bees.

The problem is that poisonous pesticides typically applied to young plants are still present later when plants are fully grown and flowering, even if no further pesticides are applied! This reality contributes to hard-working insects absorbing poison from the pollen of treated plants, causing them to weaken and die, a factor which may have contributed to recent massive losses of bee colonies occurring worldwide⁴. While flowers and plants fulfil aesthetic functions for people, they also represent an important, yet often treacherous source of food for insects and small animals. This is obviously not sustainable.

¹ eurostat (2014 data), Pesticide sales statistics. Retrieved from [here](#).

² Ntzani EE, Chondrogiorgi M, Ntritsos G, Evangelou E, Tzoulaki I, (2013). Literature review on epidemiological studies linking exposure to pesticides and health effects. Reference from [here](#).

³ Greenpeace and natur&ëmwelt (2014, July 2). Pesticides in ornamental plants. Samples from Luxembourg. Retrieved from [here](#).

⁴ Greenpeace International (2014, July 2). Greenpeace Research Laboratories Technical Report (2013, January). Bees in Decline - A review of factors that put pollinators and agriculture in Europe at risk. Retrieved from [here](#).

When buying flowers and ornamental plants for your own garden, the dangers of pesticide residues for pollinating insects cannot be excluded. In order to keep natural spaces protected from dangerous chemical substances, all future ornamental plants must be both produced and sold without the use of pesticides. Since 2015, the project "[Flowers without pesticides](#)" has been trying to find a solution to this complex problem. Together with buyers, sellers and plant producers, the goal is to have public and private urban spaces designed and maintained completely and consistently pesticide free.

Certainly we have a long way to go. However this pesticide-free approach presents enormous prospects for protecting our pollinating insects, such as bees, butterflies and hoverflies as well as for creating an important market for participating Luxembourgish gardening firms. That's why we ask you to please support this important goal by buying pesticide-free flowers and ornamental plants whenever you can. Ask your friends to do the same!

You can find a list of the participating gardening firms and the latin or german names for the pesticide-free plants they sell [here](#).

It's up to you - Ask for pesticide-free plants!

