

My readers, acquaintances and friends often ask questions about corn gluten, a non-toxic alternative to weed control especially in lawns. Three great instructive websites are: www.gluten.iastate.edu/grndmain.html, www.waltsorganic.com/products/weedstop.html, and www.uwex.edu/ces/wihort/turf/CornGluten.html. If you can't access the sites I'd be happy to send you copies of the information. Send me an email at gardenmentor@yahoo.com or write me in care of this newspaper.

Dr. Nick Christians, Iowa State University, noticed corn gluten's effects for controlling weeds in his research and began testing it in turf finding it to be very effective. Thank you Dr. Nick. Christians found too that corn gluten provides a 10 percent nitrogen fertilizer to plants. For even more data on his discoveries and research findings use www.Google.com as your search engine and key in Nick Christians or corn gluten.

Corn gluten is a byproduct of the extraction of corn syrup from corn seed and of the wet milling process to make cornstarch. The gluten inhibits root formation of germinating seeds. Seeds sprout but the roots won't sustain the plant to maturity. Corn gluten will deter both annual and perennial seeds. Avoid using corn gluten on areas where you want plants to reseed themselves or to grow from newly sown seeds. It's safe to use though any time during the growing season once plants are established.

Corn gluten is very successfully used in lawn care. A clear, concise explanation of using corn gluten for pre-emergent weed control is found at the Walt's Organic site. His product is marketed as "Organic Weed-Stopper Plus." Walt says, "It [corn gluten] will retard germination for about six to eight weeks." He recommends two applications on lawns in the Pacific Northwest: March 15 (to control spring weeds like crabgrass) and September 15 (to deter fall dandelions).

Corn gluten stays viable for five to six weeks. After this time, seeds can be planted and will germinate. (Remember, don't apply corn gluten and then plant grass seed right away in your lawn) Alas, corn gluten does not kill established dandelions. But, it does prevent dandelion seeds from germinating. Twenty-three other plants are susceptible to corn gluten including – barnyard grass, smooth crabgrass, curly dock, black nightshade, orchard grass, shattercane, purslane, woolly cupgrass, giant foxtail, lambsquarters, buckhorn, quackgrass, velvetleaf, annual bluegrass, dandelions, creeping bentgrass, black medic, redroot pigweed, and catchweed bedstraw.

Ladd Smith, In Harmony Inc. from Woodinville, and EJ Hooks, Grounds Maintenance Supervisor for Woodland Park Zoo, Seattle, recently spoke at the K.I.S.S. (Kitsap Investigates Sustainable Solutions) Workshop at Olympic College. Both have had very good results using corn gluten as an organic herbicide. Smith and Hooks report the reduction of weeds by 50 percent or more the first year, 60-70 percent the second and third years and 80-90 percent by the third or fourth years. I like those odds.

Kitsap gardeners report finding corn gluten at Valley Nursery, Bainbridge Gardens and Country Gardens Nursery. Other nurseries and garden centers in our county may carry it or you can ask them to order it for you.

While you're at the nurseries look for a new pheromone-laced ring for repelling aphids from rose bushes. Ann Lovejoy showed me the product at Bainbridge Gardens. On the box the trap looks like a red lifesaver. You attach the pheromone-laced ring to rose bushes. The aphids think the bushes are full of aphid devouring predators and avoid the plants. Each trap keeps aphids away in a 20-foot radius. I forgot the name of the product, but I know the able nursery staff can steer you right to the product.