BUG ZAPPERS

Nasty, noisy, killing grids. What do we know about the electronic bug zapper?

This morning a lovely little girl in my neighborhood brought the cocoon of a polyphemus moth to my door. As we identified it, I was remembering a quote from entomologist Wally Morse:

"Under the trap there were lunas and cecopias flopping all over the ground. They fly into these things and burn a wing."

Years ago, my son was the youngest member of the Milwaukee Entomological Society and lunas were his love! Those were the days before our communities began helicopter spraying with DDT.

The occasional bug zapper isn’t nearly as ubiquitous in its destruction, but it may diminish species locally by disrupting food chains. The birds and the bats would be some to suffer the deprivation as they are feeding their young. Important predators such as the caterpillar hunter beetle and tiny parasites that control threatening moth populations could topple out of balance in a bug zapping landscape. The annoying, spitting crackles burn many beneficial insects while not contributing to the comfort level of the home owner, unless it is in his imagination.

Biting insects are drawn by smell to carbon dioxide, humidity and the chemicals in mammalian sweat. SCIENCE 85 reported in two controlled experiments that the devices did nothing at all to decrease the number of mosquito bites.

The light does attract pollinators of showy flowering plants. This may decrease the seed production in our prairie restorations. And, because the zappers attract more insects than they can possibly kill, pest species and their egg masses might concentrate near our gardens.

In our abysmal ignorance, we have depleted the diversity of life in so many areas. One would hope that at least a few big, beautiful moths from George Otto’s time could be protected to delight the Lindsay Cunninghams of today.

Sorrië Otto
A PESTICIDE BY ANY OTHER NAME...

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) uses pesticides as a general term that includes insecticides, rodenticides, fungicides and herbicides.

WHY ONE VILLAGE DECIDED NOT TO USE HERBICIDES

At a recent Village of Bayside Board meeting, Village Manager Joseph Tanski explained why herbicides no longer are sprayed on dandelions. He was quoted in an article printed in several suburban editions of The Herald.

"We're in a new age," Tanski said. "Certain chemicals we used to use we can no longer use. Some of our employees are asking for protective clothing if they spray. The easiest thing to do is to cut weeds before they flower. If we do use chemicals, we must file data sheets with the state, which could cost up to $800 a year. We must also be concerned with the safety of our workers, and whether we contaminate the air."

One citizen noted that many residents continue to hire lawn services at considerable expense to spray their yards for weeds and that protective clothing is not worn by the maintenance people. "There is nothing in the spray that is a health hazard," she said.

1990 SENATE HEARINGS FOCUS ON PESTICIDE DANGERS

The US Senate Subcommittee on Toxic Substances, Environmental Oversight and Development reviewed the General Accounting Office's new report, "Lawn Care Pesticides: Risks Remain Uncertain While Prohibited Safety Claims Continue."

As noted in the newsletter of the Rachel Carson Council, the GAO report emphasizes the lack of even partial testing of most pesticides now registered, serious health hazards already known about many of the most-used products and the misleading and indeed illegal claims made for them by commercial applicators. Statements were given by the Attorney General of New York, the National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides and victims of pesticide poisoning.

CAN LAWNs KILL?

A "Keep Off the Grass" sign no longer just requests neighbors to walk around a freshly-seeded area. Today, "Keep Off the Grass" may mean danger.

According to the National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides (NCAMP), if you have your lawn chemically treated, take these precautions: Do not walk barefoot on it, do not inhale it, get your children and all pets inside, take toys in the house and close the windows.

"Keep Off the Grass," a report published in 1989 by Public Citizen's Congress Watch, indicts the billion-dollar US lawn care industry and the failure of federal and state governments to regulate it.

"People just don't realize that even the herbicides they put on their lawns are dangerous," said Elaine Sabin of Bellevue, Nebraska, who has won national recognition for a natural backyard wildlife habitat.
"If consumers can buy a product in their lawn and garden store, they assume it must be safe," agreed Catherine Karr, toxicologist for NCAMP. Karr said that part of the outrage many people like herself feel revolves around the question of necessity. "Lawn care is an aesthetic," she said. "We try (at NCAMP) to show people that alternatives (to herbicides) do exist that will produce a healthy, pretty lawn."

Sabin said that every spring as the lawn chemical trucks start to roll, she and her bird-loving friends receive calls reporting multiple bird deaths.

Wildlife specialists such as Diana Conger of Washington, D.C., call bird poisonings in residential areas "lawncare syndrome." Symptoms enumerated by toxicologists include excessive salivation, grand mal seizures, wild flapping and screaming, most often followed by death. Ward Stone, New York State's wildlife pathologist, sees more than that in the poisonings.

"The songbirds act as miners' canaries for us in detecting the buildup of chemicals that may ultimately threaten humans," Stone said.

The potential, if not present, harm to humans is staggering. The herbicide 2,4-D, for instance, one of the components of the defoliant Agent Orange used in Vietnam, is sold under various names and can be purchased in about 1,500 products. A major manufacturer is Dow Chemical Co.

"The EPA has been playing catchup since 1982," said Karr. That year, new EPA regulations demanded retesting of pesticides determined to be inadequately tested. "Data on the full range of chronic health effects, including reproductive problems, birth defects and cancer," is limited, she said.

According to the National Academy of Sciences, lawn use is a significant component of the total pesticide problem. NAS said that although the farmer uses pesticides more widely, the homeowner uses 10 times more per acre than farmers use. Donald Lewis, Iowa State Extension entomologist, said that the potential for environmental damage is just as serious from lawn chemicals as it is from agricultural chemicals. "When you have a tank overturn on a farmland, it may spill into the stream," he said. "When a tank overturns in the city, it can spill into the storm sewer."

Lewis advocates a Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach. IPM opts for substituting adapted grasses and cultural practices for chemical use. Public Citizen's Congress Watch recommends an amendment to the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act to require pesticide applicator training and competency in IPM. Lewis said the act is a "minimal set of federal guidelines that the state can make more stringent."

Karr said that when homeowners use a lawn service, they often have no idea about the dangers of the product. Maryland, Massachusetts and New York are demanding the most of lawn companies in consumer notification.

Existing state laws, however, do not address pesticide over-application by homeowners, who can buy products with visible labels. Lewis and other experts suspect that homeowners routinely exceed suggested application rates misguidedly believing that "four times as much will make it four times better" -- all without being required to notify or post signs.

"Once we have a data base for homeowner use," said Lewis, "we might see tighter regulations for over-the-counter pesticides."

This is a condensation of an article printed in the Heartland Journal. It was written by volunteer environmentalists Colleen Aagesen and Mary Fiscus.
Natural landscaping:

In traveling through local neighborhoods, one can be easily impressed with landscaping efforts that have created a patchwork quilt of green uniformity along a network of avenues and roadways.

Well-groomed lawns exhibit shades varying from olive to emerald, constant in texture and height, with only an occasional, tenacious weed blemishing re­splendent canvases.

But the real imperfection may not lie in the solitary dandelion, so obvious in a sea of green, nor in a few brown spots on an otherwise-immaculate summer lawn. Instead, another real concern lies in the price being paid to achieve this annual aesthetic effect.

Besides the cost of person power used in lawn maintenance, the concern points to the toll being taken on an infinitely wider back yard: planet Earth.

A recent visit to a local lawn-and­garden shop revealed the extent to which we struggle to achieve a fleeting measure of control over our summer greenery. With one or two exceptions, the store shelves are packed with an assortment of pesticides, herbicides and other chemicals used to eradicate just about anything that grows or crawls.

All containers bear warning labels, cautioning danger in exposure to the contents. Many of these substances can cause serious damage to not only pets, but humans. Yet, year after year, tons and gallons of the chemicals are poured, powdered and sprayed onto our lawns and into our waterways and air.

Contamination of surrounding wildlife eco-systems has been assured, not to mention possible ill effects upon humans.

There are a few exceptions to the chemical-spreading approach, however. In fact, a growing number of Ozaukee County residents are attempting to foster healthy yards by integrating the needs of their families with those of plants and wildlife.

For the past 12 years, Paul and Georgia Prentiss have been pursuing a more nat­ural landscape on a one-acre lot adjacent to their Mequon home. Acting on the advice of a friend, Art Lonergan, the couple has adopted a “letting it go” policy on a once-barren piece of land.

After planting numerous trees and conducting seasonal maintenance, the Prentisses have succeeded in creating a wooded area which has proven beneficial to local wildlife, as well as their own lifestyle.

Direct shade from the trees has reduced the Prentisses’ air-conditioning bills. Less lawn means less mowing and, thanks to the increased shade, requires less water. Besides producing a less-expensive utility bill, reduced water usage benefits an already-low water table in Ozaukee County.
County.

"My lot provides beauty and benefits, seasonally," Georgia said.

When approaching the home of Raymond and Kristin Summerfield in the Town of Cedarburg, it becomes apparent that the family's attitudes toward landscaping, the environment, the Earth and its inhabitants have become inseparable issues.

The Summerfields' property contains a wide variety of natural foliage and flora, as well as trees, shrubs, herbs and flowers planted by the couple. The yard provides a haven for birds, amphibians, reptiles, insects and other animals.

"In landscaping, my goal is to create a safe and aesthetically pleasing yard that integrates the needs of wildlife and the needs of my family and to best encourage the widest diversity of life that I can," Kristin said. "To that end, we continue to plant trees, shrubs and wildflowers and we have discontinued the use of chemicals onto our lawn."

Reciting the ill effects of herbicides, Kristin said that more than the intended villains are often killed by the broadcasting (spreading) of chemicals.

"Broadcasting along our roadsides takes away food plants needed for butterflies and insects and cover needed for ground-nesting birds," she explained.

The Summerfields' approach to "natural landscaping" has its roots in previous family generations, which practiced similar techniques, Kristin said. Today, the couple enjoys the natural surroundings with their two children.

Kristin's commitment to avoiding use of chemicals on the property has been strengthened by her involvement in the Wild Ones, an organization of natural landscapers in the metro-Milwaukee area. The group, in which Kristin serves as secretary, promotes landscaping through the use of native plants and encourages the elimination of herbicides and pesticides on lawns.

For the Summerfields, Prentisses and a number of other families in Ozaukee County, alternatives to the use of lawn chemicals have become more than just a choice made during summer months. The presence of seasonal plant and animal life in a yard free of health hazards offers a variety of learning experiences throughout the year.

"It affords educational opportunities for not only my children, but a place for salamanders, toads and frogs," Kristin said.

The above article by Jean Lord used courtesy of Cedarburg's News Graphic Pilot.
COMMON MILKWEED
(Asclepias syriaca)
Milkweed Family

OTHER NAMES: Silkweed, Swallowwort, Wild Cotton, Virginia Silk, Wild Asparagus, Silky Swallowwort

HABITAT: Waste places, old fields, roadsides. FLOWERING: June - August

DESCRIPTION: This is a tall, downy plant with pink to purplish flowers that droop slightly. Each floret is about 1/2 in. wide, with 5 downward-pointing petals and a conspicuous 5-part central crown, in clusters 2 in. wide. The leaves are 4 to 10 in. long, opposite, broad to oblong, light green with gray down underneath. They exude a milky juice when bruised. The fruit is a rough-textured pod that splits open on one side, filled with overlapping seeds that are covered with silky hairs. Height is 2 to 6 ft.

COMMENTS: During World War II, researchers tried to make rubber from the milky sap of this plant. The expense and trouble of extracting the sap, in relation to the amount of rubber-like material gained, made the process impractical. This milky juice in the stem protects the plant from ants because their feet puncture the stem and get caught up in the sticky stuff. Attempts have been made to use it as a cotton substitute. Both in France and Russia, it has had textile use. The fibers of the stem, prepared in the same manner as those of hemp and flax, furnish a very long, fine thread, of a glossy whiteness. It has been woven into muslins and in India has been made into paper.

The flowers produce abundant nectar. Indians would shake the morning dew from the flowers into a bowl and use it as a sweetener. The French and eastern Canadians adopted this method to make sugar from the flowers.

The seed hairs, or floss, are soft, delicate fibers that are somewhat like kapok. During World War II, when there was a shortage of tropical kapok, the milkweed floss became important and was used as a substitute to stuff life vests. These "Mae Wests" saved many people from drowning. Much of this floss was collected by Canadian schoolchildren as their contribution to the war effort.

MEDICINAL USE: The milk of the Common Milkweed resembled mother's milk and, therefore, was used to treat or prevent faulty lactation - a practice still engaged in by Indian women.

At one time, the root was used extensively as a healing herb. It was used as a contraceptive and for treating dysentery. The fresh sap was used to take away warts, corns, callouses, and to cure ringworm and reduce the irritability of sores. The dried leaves were mixed with tobacco and smoked in a pipe to help asthma, pleurisy, and bronchial problems.

The prime purpose of the seed was its value, when boiled and soaked in a small amount of water, in drawing out the poison from rattlesnake bites.

NAME ORIGIN: The Common Name comes from the milky juice in the stems and leaves. The Genus Name, Asclepias (As-klee'pi-as), comes from the Greek god of medicine, whose Latin name is Aesculapius. The Species Name means, "Syrian." This plant appears to be misnamed, because it is a native of North America and Canada. However, it also grows abundantly in Syria.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: There are several other species of Milkweeds growing in our area. On our property alone, we have the Whorled Milkweed (Asclepias verticillata), Swamp or Marsh Milkweed (Asclepias incarnata), Poke Milkweed (Asclepias exaltata), and Butterfly-Weed (Asclepias tuberosa).

The Whorled Milkweed grows in profusion on our well-drained Kettle Moraine hillside. When it blooms, the whole country-side smells wonderful. It seems to be more potent at dusk or after dark. If only the fragrance could be captured and stored for the rest of the world to enjoy and appreciate. I'd like to believe that if everyone could smell, feel, see, and learn about our wild plants, that there would be more effort made to save them.

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W6311 Mullet Lane
Plymouth, WI 53073
Letting the lawn run wild

Tall grasses and wildflowers make creature-friendly yards

The coming of the fall season has Jeff Johnson of Matteson, Ill., going wild. In the corners of his small suburban yard, he attracts insects, field mice and shrews with piles of discarded leaves and branches. He keeps the native grasses, next to a pond, unmowed to lure muskrats and waterfowl.

His reward: A dazzling array of birds and butterflies plus occasional raccoons and skunks—even raccoons and Canada geese. Johnson's neighbors don't mind; many, he says, don't know what he's doing. "They just say, 'Oh, what pretty wildflowers you have.'"

But Johnson's idea is catching on. More than 9,000 Americans are now part of the National Wildlife Federation's Backyard Wildlife Habitat (BWH) program (call 800-432-6564). Most join, says the program director, Craig Tufts, out of concern for small animals that have been displaced by development. Some are also swayed by movement "priestess" Lorrie Otto, who teaches natural landscaping in Milwaukee and speaks of mowing as "immoral." BWH members' backyard habitats range from 5 acres of Arizona desert visited by road runners and coyotes to the balcony of a fourth-floor apartment in East Boston frequented by birds and butterflies.

Attracting a wide variety of wildlife, says Tufts, takes more than hanging out a bird feeder, although that's a good start. You may need to replace favorite plants that offer shade and color with varieties that give animals better food and cover. Roger Eddy of Greendale, Wis., created a constant food supply in his quarter-acre yard with a mix of trees—sugar maples, crab apples, dogwoods and junipers—that bear fruit and seeds at different times of the year, attracting finches, cardinals, rabbits and sometimes raccoons. Your state's fish and game department can tell you the best trees and shrubs for wildlife in your area.

Equally valuable is a dependable source of water. A dripping hose or a fiberglass pond of water, fitted into the ground and kept ice-free, if necessary, with a garden heater, will sustain birds and animals throughout the winter, and might even contain tadpoles next spring.

Creating a habitat is not synonymous with creating neglect. Some ecological habitats are, in fact, the aesthetic match of any manicured lawn. But Florida landscaper Jody Walthall advises homeowners to check city or neighborhood ordinances before they start planting.

Concerns about attracting pests and snakes are overblown, says Walthall. Garbage, not plants and berries, attracts rats. Wire fences can protect vegetable gardens from rabbits. The larger bird population should keep insects in check.

Most garden-variety snakes such as king and garter snakes are harmless and sometimes eat real pests. In the South and the West there is a greater chance of encountering poisonous snakes, which may have to be exterminated.

For fussy gardeners, going wild takes some adjustment. "It's like having a child in the house," says Jeff Johnson. "You learn to live with a little disorder."

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Upcoming classes:

Prairie Restoration - Instructor: Robert Ahrenhoester. For more details call UW-Waukesha (414/521-5460).

Wildflowers, Landscapes That Attract Wildlife, Designing a "Native" Landscape, Lecture and Workshop, Instructor: Dan Boehlke.

Natural Landscaping in the Midwest, Instructor: Lorrie Otto.

Winter Landscaping, Instructor: Marilyn Radtke. Call Concordia University (414/234-5700) for the five classes listed above.
If there is nothing moving in your yard but your lawn mower, it is time to follow these steps to create a naturalized area:

Imagine... problem places in your yard becoming the most inviting areas for attracting butterflies and birds. Now if your space is too shady or damp for grass, it is probably a perfect place for a mass of violets, ferns, or wild geraniums. If the view from your favorite window is never changing or interesting, imagine this area instead as a splash of color and texture, moving in the wind. Another place to start may be the row of stagnant bushes on the lot line that has become boring over the years. Take the first important step of imagining your problem area as a choice place for boldly starting the garden of your dreams.

Evaluate... soil types to determine how compatible plants will be and how well they will grow. We recommend the "Prairie Nursery Catalog" for wonderful basic information regarding soil and for lists of appropriate plants. Plant descriptions and color photographs make this catalog a great value at $2. (Prairie Nursery, P.O. Box 306, Westfield, WI 53964.)

Prepare... soil for planting. This fall is the perfect time for layering sand and leaves gathered from your yard or your community. The importance of this basic step cannot be over-emphasized. All of the work planting pays off if your soil is properly enriched.

Design... as you dig and start to plant. Naturally, your plant choices should be indigenous, and avoid planting in rows or circles. Mass plants naturally as in a forest, or group flowers in your prairie for a color accent. Don't over-look native grasses which add a softness and airiness to large plantings as well as holding up the forbs. Knowing texture and height of plants helps in planning as well as knowing which plants will look best through the winter season.

Enjoy... your natural garden through the seasons as the perennials multiply. Enjoy the compliments and receive thanks as you start to share your multiplying bounty with friend and neighbors.

Maintain... your property by learning the best times to clean up. Some heavily textured, tall plants such as the cup plant may be cleaned up in the fall so as not to mar the winter landscape. Natural recycling can be done by top mulching around bushes. By spring flowers will poke through and there will be no compost pile to turn. The joy of a natural yard is that the maintenance is varied, but should be done in a timely fashion to prevent complaints from the uninitiated. - Rochelle Whiteman

GREETINGS! The summer has flown by and the flowers have been wonderful. It is so exciting to see what our yards and The Wild Ones have done. The yard tours were a great success, and there are lots of new folks interested in joining... Already, we're looking forward to next year. We have been incorporated and are continuing to work for tax-exempt status to bring down our mailing fees. Then there is the winter seminar, which as always will be the second Saturday in February, and it will need some volunteers for advertising and publicity. And, in addition, the officers' terms will expire next April, which means there will be need of a nominating committee and people who are willing to serve in these capacities... There is lots to do and a real need for people to come forward and volunteer their services. It means there are a lot of opportunities for you to get more involved and really have a lot of fun in this organization. If you don't believe it, just ask me. I'm having a ball! Let any officers know of your interest. I'm eager to see you at our next meeting. - Deb Harwell
JUNE: Everyone has heard of "Little House on the Prairie," but we saw prairie on the house! We went to Waukesha to see the home of Mary and Rick Hauf, where they have a prairie not only around their home but also on their roof. We were lucky to get a chance to talk with the Haufs and meet the personalities that would plant a prairie on their rooftop. Ordinarily, they maintain their prairie by burning. Our wet spring prevented an early burn this year. By the time weather conditions were right for burning, there were so many pasque flowers in bloom that the Haufs could not bring themselves to burn them off. This is a problem many of us would like!

We made a brief stop at Marlin Johnson's home in Waukesha. We did not have time to tour his yard, but everyone had a chance to sit on -- and try out -- his variety of Aldo Leopold benches. We suggest that you try angling the back of the bench at various degrees to see which is more comfortable for you. The angle on the original design is not comfortable for everyone.

JULY: A busload of Wild Ones and Wehr Nature Center wildflower club members went to Kohler, Wis. We were honored to be the guests of the Kohler Club's landscape designer, David Grant.

We had a wonderful lunch at the Kohler Club and then toured the beautifully designed driveway that leads up to the golf course. We were disappointed, however, to see Nebraska prairie plantings rather than Wisconsin plants. In September, we will have a chance to see Wisconsin prairie plantings, which are so important for preserving our native genotypes.

AUGUST: This month’s meeting is our traditional "help me" day. We had a wonderful hands-on learning experience visiting the yard at a new home where there was raw land because the developers had scraped everything off.

As we gave the homeowner ideas to restore her land, we also learned a lot ourselves (i.e., what great ragweed looks like!). As we walked from the owner's berm to her woods and down to the river, we saw various ecosystems. On the berm, the suggestion was to plant wild strawberries mixed with silverweed (Potentilla anserina). These plants would provide a rapidly spreading, tight ground cover. As a medium-height planting for the berm, wild roses were suggested. The next height could be gray dogwood and hazelnut shrubs. Last, wild raisin or nannyberry were suggested.

Part of the property had been seeded in prairie plants. The owner had watered this area once a week. The project had not been successful because it had dried out at a crucial time and many seeds were lost. These seeds must be kept moist constantly for the first three weeks. Once established prairie plants can handle dry weather, but need tender care the first year.

We also learned not to pull out weeds in a new plantings because it disturbs the soil, making it easier for new weeds to invade. Rather than pulling them out, cut off the tops of the weeds.

WITCH HAZEL Hamamelis virginiana. WOODLAND
Fragrant yellow flowers with ribbon-like petals appear on this shrub in the fall. It likes to grow in shady sites in woods or under shade trees, but will also grow well in sun. Fall foliage is golden yellow.

Special thanks to Peggy Daum Judge who helped edit this edition.
SEPTEMBER: We'll be taking a trip to Riveredge Nature Center in Newburg where we will be guided through several prairie restorations by Director Andy Larson. Donations for the bus trip are requested.

OCTOBER: This is our annual seed gathering and time for transplanting New England asters.

NOVEMBER: Carol Fuchs, will join us again to talk about shady plants.

DECEMBER: Our holiday meeting with a cookie and seed exchange.

The Wild Ones Natural Landscapers
Pres. - Deb Harwell, 8712 N. Spruce Road, River Hills, WI 53217 (351-4253)
V. Pres. - Lucy Schumann, 8108 N. Regent Road, Fox Point, WI 53217 (352-0313)
Sec. - Kristen Summerfield, 7901 W. Bridge, Cedarburg, WI 53012 (375-1230)
Treas. - Sue Hurda, 4528 W. Hiawatha Drive, Mequon, WI 53092 (242-5910)
Newsletter - Carol Chew, 8920 N. Lake Drive, Bayside, WI 53217 (351-0644)
Mentor - Lorrie Otto, 9701 N. Lake Drive, Bayside, WI 53217 (352-0734)

Meetings are held on second Saturdays at 9:30 a.m. at Schlitz Audubon Center, 1111 E. Brown Deer Rd., Milwaukee, WI 53217, 414/352-2880. Dues are $12/yr.