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JOHN'S CORNER: GARDENING NEWS

by John Ferguson

A new study from the University of Otago in New Zealand has found that after ingesting very small amount of the pesticide chlorpyrifos, honeybees suffer severe learning and memory problems (they could not remember where the flowers were). The study found that chlorpyrifos was in air, water, and plant samples in Non-sprayed areas of the country. This pesticide will easily volatilize and travel great distances. Problems occurred at sub-lethal doses of only 50 billionths of a gram ingested per bee! This is an amount thousands of times less than a lethal dose. I wonder if this toxic chemical is adding to the growing mental decline and dementia problem in this country as it is on many of our conventionally grown foods (another reason to buy "Organic" whenever possible).

The University of Illinois has developed a new organic weed control technology called "Weed Blasting". They blast weeds with tiny pieces of organic grit using an air compressor (think sand blaster). The grit leaves the nozzle at over 700 miles per hour and shreds the weeds killing them. This technique was as effective as hand weeding when applied at the right time during weed growth on mulched beds. They tested various types of grit (walnut shells, granulated corncobs, greensand and soybean meal) and the type did not matter. This technique has the potential for gardeners to apply organic fertilizers as a blasting media. The gardener can apply the fertilizer and do weed control at the same time. It affects some weeds more than others and the smaller the weed the better the results (similar to flame weeding methods). It was most effective on weeds, which have their growing parts above ground like annual broadleaf species. It was less effective on grasses and perennials whose growing tips are below ground.