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JOHN'S CORNER:

NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS

by John Ferguson

This week I want to start with a Rubber Mulch update. A colleague of mine Randy Lemon of Gardenline and I have been trying to spread the word on the dangers of rubber mulch for years. This morning I was having my tires rotated, and noticed a flyer at the tire store advertizing rubber mulch made from old tires. It stated that it was only \$ 6.49 per 0.8 cubic feet bag, which did not seem too bad until one does the math. A standard mulch bag (Soil and Mulch Producers Association standards) is two cubic feet. That means too get enough rubber mulch to equal a standard bag it would cost \$25.96 per bag. If we compare this to bulk prices, to get enough bags of toxic rubber mulch to equal a cubic yard it would cost **\$350.46 per cubic yard!**

Another study in the journal Chemosphere in 2012 found that recycled rubber tires used on playgrounds and pavers contained a large number of hazardous substances. These include PAH's, phthalates, BHT, phenols, benzothiazole and its derivatives, among other chemicals.

On a positive note, I read about a new technique to control to protect apple orchards from fire blight. A company (Bee Vector Technology) has developed a method of using honeybees to deliver a good fungus that protects the tree. They place a tray of a natural powdered fungus (BVT-CR7) at the entrance to the hives, which is harmless to the bees. The bees coat their legs with it as they leave the hive. As bees forage for pollen and nectar they carry this good fungus and deposit on the apple flowers, where the fungus grows and spreads harmlessly on the leaves and tree. This good fungus prevents pathogenic bacteria and parasites from colonizing the leaves. A small hive of only 300 bees can protect 10 million flowers. As a result, growers have to use less toxic chemicals, which in turn reduce the bee's exposure to these chemicals.

A study by Oxford University found that organic farms support 50% more pollinator species than conventional toxic chemical intensive agriculture. The way we grow food is harming butterflies, along



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with a host of other species - from birds and ladybugs to earthworms. Meanwhile these pesticides are contaminating our soil and water, which cause numerous human health problems.

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