

Accreditation course will teach landscapers how to avoid using chemical agents

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GREENWICH -- This fall, the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Connecticut (CT NOFA) will lead its Accreditation Course in Organic Land Care in Fairfield County for the first time.

In March, the World Health Organization's (WHO) International Agency for Research on Cancer issued a report declaring glyphosate -- the active ingredient in Roundup, a widely used agricultural herbicide produced by chemical giant Monsanto -- to be "probably carcinogenic to humans."

Glyphosate exhibited "limited evidence of carcinogenicity in humans" but "sufficient evidence of carcinogenicity in experimental animals," according to the WHO report, which said glyphosate had been detected in air, water, and food.

"The general population is exposed primarily through residence near sprayed areas, home use, and diet," said the report, although "the level that has been observed is generally low."

"For decades, people have been led to believe that glyphosate and other organophosphates are not harmful to people or the environment," said Jeff Cordulack, executive director of CT NOFA. "This is not the case, and many studies (including this latest report by WHO) have pointed to their dangers."

Due to health and soil damage risks associated with chemical pesticides and herbicides, as well as Connecticut's 2010 ban on chemical pesticides near elementary schools, it would behoove landscapers and landscape architects, as well as environmental educators and lawn enthusiasts, to familiarize themselves with methods of chemical-free land care, said Jeff Cordulack, executive director of CT NOFA.

In the NOFA course, "we're going to learn about organic fertilizers, amendments, and methods that restore the soil's fertility," Cordulack told The Hour. "This course is an ideal way for businesses to add new skills and services for their clients."

"(The course) will help people who want to do gardening of all sorts better understand organic



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practices," Cordulack added.

Students of the program will embark on a series of hourlong classes covering many aspects of organic soil care: Site Analysis, Soil Biology & Ecology, Tick Control, and Mulches are among the classes listed on the course's four-day itinerary.

According to Cordulack, the course hinges on what he calls the "soil food web:" the symbiotic process by which the soil and its inhabitants -- "bacteria, protozoa, fungi, nematodes, anthropods, all the little soil critters," in Cordulack's words -- provide nourishment to one another.

"A single teaspoon ... of rich garden soil can hold up to one billion bacteria, several yards of fungal filaments, several thousand protozoa, and scores of nematodes," Cordulack added.

Because the creatures that live in soil are crucial to the soil's health, using store-bought pesticides to eradicate all insects from a lawn or garden can seriously hurt the land's ability to sustain plant life, as well, Cordulack said.

For example, "it's common for lawns and gardens that are treated with synthetic chemicals to be devoid of soil life," Cordulack told The Hour. "This results in an inability to hold air and moisture, creating compacted soil, which makes it difficult for the plants' roots to grow."

"To have a great lawn that is relatively pest-free, landscapers need to have an understanding of the soil food web and how to allow it to thrive," Cordulack added. "Adding chemicals and a few nutrients simply won't do the trick."

The NOFA Accreditation Course in Organic Land Care will take place Oct. 26-27 and Nov. 2-3 at the Audubon Center in Greenwich. Attendance is limited to 50 students. To sign up, call CT NOFA at (203) 308-2584 or visit www.organiclandcare.net.