

THRU THE GREEN

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WASH-OFF DATA SURPRISES RESEARCHERS

Storms pose no more problems than showers.

It's not the intensity but the volume of rain that counts when it comes to washing pesticides off plants.

The first tenth of an inch of rain removes almost all of the pesticide that is going to wash off, regardless of how long it takes for that amount to fall, according to studies by USDA Agricultural Research Services soil scientist Guye H. Willis.

"It doesn't matter whether it takes a minute or an hour—a heavy storm or a sprinkle—for a tenth of an inch of rain to fall, it's that volume that's the significant factor, not how hard the raindrops hit the leaves," said Willis, who works at the ARS Soil and Water Research Unit in Baton Rouge, La.

The studies, indicate that organochlorine pesticides are the least susceptible to being washed off by rainfall. Water-soluble chemicals are the most susceptible.

For example, one-tenth inch of rain will wash off about 50 percent of a water-soluble pesticide that was on the plant when the rain began. Only about 2 percent of the organochlorine pesticide, which has very limited solubility in water, would wash off in the same amount of rain.

Previous studies didn't consider which is the significant factor in pesticide washoff—the amount of rain, the size of raindrops or the energy with which they fall.

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