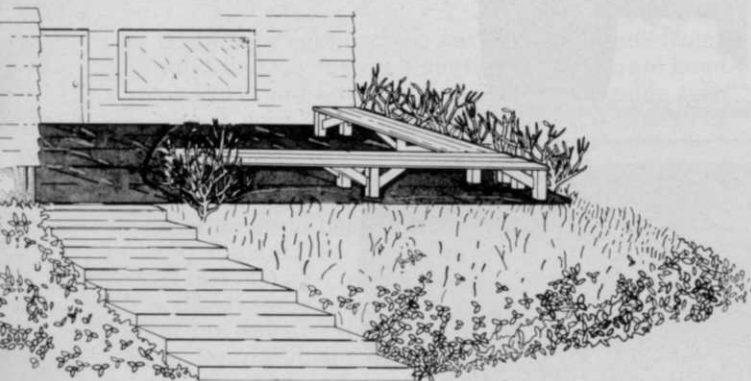


WOOD PRESERVATIVES ON STRUCTURES MAY HARM NEARBY LANDSCAPES

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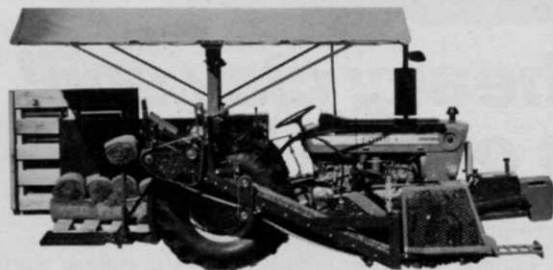
Landscape plants killed or injured by copper salts washed from patio benches. The benches were made from pressure treated construction lumber.

Durable, decay resistant wood types such as cypress, redwood, cedar and to some extent oak and ash are becoming increasingly difficult to get and to pay for. Consequently, cheaper construction lumber, primarily the soft pines and spruce, are being used for landscape purposes. Such lumber is often treated with wood preservatives to resist decay.

In 1979, a plant health problem was observed in a suburban housing community involving plants adjacent to a patio. The rectangular patio was bordered by a house on two sides and beautifully terraced, on the other sides, with periwinkle and euonymus. In early summer, benches made of soft pine pressure treated with a copper salt were set in place on the terrace sides of the patio. The day after installation the owner hosed off the benches to remove the surface of green colored copper salts. During the hosing, the leaves on the terrace plants were splattered with diluted salts and the roots received all of the washwater.

Within one week, phytotoxicity symptoms were noted and within two weeks the euonymus was defoliated. Periwinkle plants within two feet of the

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patio edge were likewise defoliated and in four weeks those within 18 inches were dead. In four weeks phytotoxic symptoms, of leaf drop and varying degrees of chlorosis, were evident down slope for a distance of four to six feet. Symptoms were less severe as the distance from the patio edge increased.

Nine weeks after the patio benches were installed, impatiens, a bedding plant considered highly reactive to salts, were planted in the area. Those impatiens closest to the patio, within the 18 inch band, defoliated within six days, indicating that the copper salts had not leached sufficiently to permit their growth. The periwinkle that survived nine weeks began to refoilate although the leaves were stunted. The euonymous did not refoilate but the new buds appeared healthy.

In the described situation a heavy rain would likely have produced the same effect as hosing the benches. Since recovery was observed late in the growing season it is assumed that dilution of the copper salts will continue during the winter to non-symptomatic levels in the spring.

Although the common wood preservatives are toxic to plants, there is little doubt that treated lumber will continue to be used in outdoor living areas. Paints and penetrating oils applied to treated lumber will give some protection from copper preservative. Where the natural appearance of the wood is important, use a clear penetrating oil such as CFW Clear Wood Finish. Such products, available in paint stores, are said to seal in the preservative salts and allow the natural grain to show through.

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