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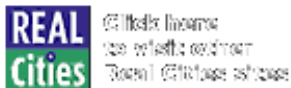
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Posted on Tue, Jun. 01, 2004

Treated wood OK for raised beds

Q. Is it safe to use pressure-treated wood to enclose a vegetable garden? Would the vegetables be tainted by the preservatives?

A. Borders for raised garden beds are a common use for pressure-treated wood. The American Wood Preservers Institute, a trade group, says that independent tests conducted with wood treated with CCA (chromated copper arsenate) showed that the wood is “not harmful in garden use.”

The research cited was conducted by county extension agents in Texas, working with the Texas A&M laboratory and Southwest Research Institute. According to the research report, preservative levels in soil samples in contact with treated wood were no higher “than what occurs naturally in any soil.”

CCA was phased out last year as a preservative in wood for residential uses and replaced by preservatives that contain no arsenic. Manufacturers recommend the same precautions for the new preservatives, most of which are copper compounds, as were recommended for CCA-treated wood.

I don't know of any formal tests of garden uses for wood treated with the new preservatives, but the Southern Pine Council, a promotional wing of the Southern Forest Products Association, says these woods are the “perfect product” for garden uses such as raised bed borders, tomato stakes, trellises and planters.

“Any assertion that gardeners should not grow edibles in planters or raised beds made with treated wood using these preservatives is without basis,” the council says.

However, the Wood Preservers Institute says, treated wood should not be used “where it is likely to become a component of food or animal feed, or where the wood is likely to mix directly with food,” such as containers for food or drinking-water, kitchen countertops and food cutting boards. In short, don't let food or drinking water come into actual contact with treated wood.

Gene Austin

Knight Ridder Newspapers

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