

ACTIVATED CHARCOAL FOR PESTICIDE DEACTIVATION

Bert McCarty

Activated charcoal (also called activated carbon) is often used to adsorb or deactivate organic chemicals such as pesticides. Activated charcoal has been used for many years to remove organic contaminants from waste waters and in water purification systems. Since most pesticides are organic chemicals, activated charcoal can effectively be used to deactivate or “tie up” these products in soil. Once the pesticide has been adsorbed onto activated charcoal, it is biologically inactive and cannot cause injury to the turfgrass. Therefore, this product can be beneficial to turfgrass managers in the case of an accidental pesticide spill or where a herbicide needs to be inactivated for seeding or sprigging of turfgrasses. Due to its dark color, thus ability to absorb heat, activated charcoal is also used to artificially warm the soil to minimize the effects of light frosts or to allow earlier seeding of an area.

Charcoal is porous, soft, black substance made by heating in an restricted amount of air, substances containing carbon such as material from hardwood trees and coconut shells. Powdered activated charcoal is made up of very small carbon particles that have a high affinity for organic chemicals such as pesticides. Activated charcoal has a large surface area and can absorb 100 to 200 times its own weight.

The amount of activated charcoal to apply to a pesticide-contaminated area varies with the chemical characteristics of the particular pesticide. Rates generally range from about 100 to 400 pounds of activated charcoal per acre (2.3 to 9.2 pounds per thousand square feet) for each pound of active ingredient of a pesticide applied per acre. A general rule is to apply about 200 pounds of activated charcoal per acre (4.6 pounds per thousand square feet) for each pound of pesticide active ingredient per acre.

Rates of activated charcoal used for spills and deactivating turf pesticides.

Application	Recommendation	Comments
Spills	For reducing the effects from spills of organic pesticides, some petroleum products, and hydraulic fluids.	Use 100 to 400 lbs of activated charcoal to every pound of active material spilled per acre (2.3 to 9.2 lbs/1000 ft ²). If the active material has not been diluted with water at the time of spill, apply the charcoal directly as a dry power. If the active material has been diluted with water, apply the activated charcoal in a slurry with a sprinkle can or common sprayer equipment. The charcoal must be incorporated into the contaminated soil, preferably to a depth of 6 inches. With severe spills, some of the contaminated soils may need removal prior to activated charcoal application.
‘Deactivating’ turf herbicides and soil warming	Turf areas that have been treated with preemergence herbicides can be reseeded earlier than normal by treating with activated charcoal.	Whenever it is desirable to terminate a preemergence herbicide, apply charcoal slurry at a rate of 2 to 4 lbs/1000 sq.ft. Water the slurry into the soil. Make sure the grass is washed free of heavy charcoal deposits. Where possible, it is desirable to rake the charcoal into the soil thoroughly. The area can be seeded 24 hrs after treatment.

Example: Suppose Balan 2.5G was inadvertently applied at 2 pounds of active ingredient per acre to an area to be seeded with a turfgrass. To completely inactivate this herbicide, an application of activated charcoal at 400 pounds per acre (or 9.2 pounds per 1000 square feet) would be needed. See the following table for additional conversions of rates per acre to pounds per 1000 square feet.

Conversion from Pounds of Activated Charcoal Per Acre to Pounds of Activated Charcoal Per 1000 Square Feet.

Rate of Activated Charcoal (pounds per acre)	Activated Charcoal Needed (pounds per 1000 square feet)
100	2.3
200	4.6
400	9.2
800	18.4
1,600	36.7
3,200	73.5

Activated charcoal can be applied by various methods. It can be applied in the dry form with a drop spreader. However, activated charcoal particles are easily moved by wind, so it may be difficult to distribute the charcoal evenly when applied in the dry form. The easiest method is to suspend the charcoal in water and apply it by hand with a watering can (for small areas) or a power sprayer. Because activated charcoal does not mix easily with water, a 0.5 % solution of a nonionic surfactant (equivalent to 1 quart per 50 gallons) will enhance its suspension in water.

Note that charcoal particles are very abrasive and can damage spray equipment (particularly rotary type pumps). Therefore, if a sprayer is used to apply activated charcoal, care should be taken to thoroughly clean the equipment when finished.

When deactivating a pesticide in a seedbed, the activated charcoal should be incorporated with a rotary tiller or other appropriate equipment so that the charcoal is placed in the upper few inches of soil. The objective is to get the activated charcoal in the same proximity as the pesticide. Uniform application of activated charcoal followed by thorough mixing is the key to inactivating a pesticide-contaminated area. If the pesticide is on the turf, in the thatch layer, or uppermost surface of the soil (for instance, if the pesticide has not been watered in), the pesticide can be inactivated by simply applying the charcoal to the area and thoroughly watering once charcoal application is complete. Again, the objective is to place the charcoal in the same proximity as the pesticide. If activated carbon is applied and either incorporated or watered correctly, inactivation of the pesticide will be successfully accomplished. For application convenience, it is recommended that activated charcoal be applied as a water slurry. To minimize dusting, always add activated charcoal to water slowly, keeping the bag as close to the water surface as possible. The following steps are suggested when mixing and applying charcoal.

Spray Application

1. Make sure spray equipment, tubing, and nozzles are completely clean. Screens should be removed if practical.
2. The final spray mixture should contain 1 to 2 lbs of charcoal per gallon of water.
3. Add sufficient water to begin moderate agitation. Simultaneously add the balance of required water and charcoal. Continue agitation until a uniform mixture is obtained.
4. Maintain moderate agitation while spraying.

It is important to understand situations where activated charcoal will not work. If a herbicide has been applied for several weeks and rainfall has occurred and/or irrigation water has been applied, the herbicide is most likely past the thatch layer and, depending on water solubility and soil adsorption of the herbicide, is probably in the upper inch or so in the soil. In this case, activated charcoal would have to be physically incorporated with a rotary tiller or other implement to get the charcoal in contact with the herbicide. The reason is activated charcoal will not leach through soil. If activated charcoal is applied to the soil surface and watered, the charcoal will remain on top of the soil and will not inactivate the herbicide below the soil surface. Activated charcoal is considered ineffective for inorganic pesticides such as arsenates, lead compounds, sodium chlorate, sulfur, borax, etc., and water-soluble organic pesticides such as, but not limited to, MSMA, and DSMA.

Activated carbon is available from most suppliers of turfgrass products. It is a good idea to keep several bags on hand so it can be applied immediately instead of having to wait for delivery. Several different brands and formulations are on the market. There appears to be little if any differences in effectiveness of the different brands. However, some may be easier to apply than others, depending on the particular situation where it is to be used.

Suppliers of activated charcoal include:

'Gro-Safe' from: American Norit Co., Inc. 1050 Crown Pointe Parkway Atlanta, GA 30338 1-800-641-9245	'Clean Carbon' from: Aquatrols 5 North Olney Ave. Cherry Hill, NJ 08003 1-800-257-7797
'52 Pickup' from: Parkway Research Corp. 13802 Chrisman Road Houston, TX 77039 1-800-442-9821	'D-Tox' from: Cleary's Chemical Corporation 178 Ridge Road Dayton, NJ 08810-1501 800-524-1662 www.clearychemical.com