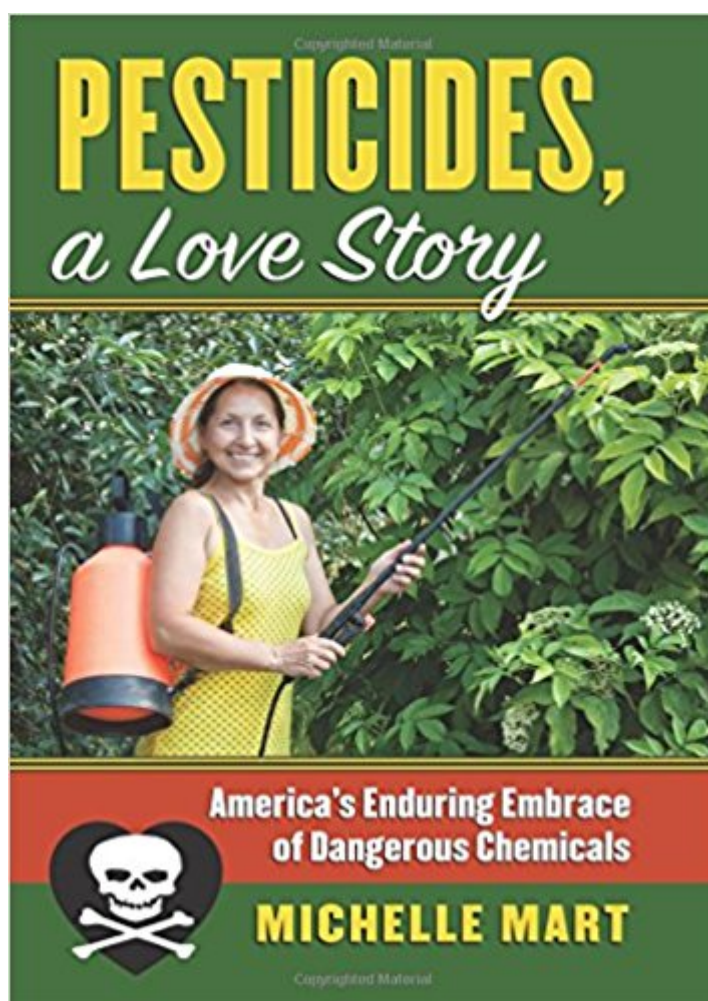


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Pesticides, A Love Story: America's Enduring Embrace Of Dangerous Chemicals (Cultureamerica)



Synopsis

“Presto! No More Pests!” proclaimed a 1955 article introducing two new pesticides, “miracle-workers for the housewife and back-yard farmer.” Easy to use, effective, and safe: who wouldn’t love synthetic pesticides? Apparently most Americans did—and apparently still do. Why—in the face of dire warnings, rising expense, and declining effectiveness—do we cling to our chemicals? Michelle Mart wondered. Her book, a cultural history of pesticide use in postwar America, offers an answer. America’s embrace of synthetic pesticides began when they burst on the scene during World War II and has held steady into the 21st century—for example, more than 90% of soybeans grown in the US in 2008 are Roundup Ready GMOs, dependent upon generous use of the herbicide glyphosate to control weeds. Mart investigates the attraction of pesticides, with their up-to-the-minute promise of modernity, sophisticated technology, and increased productivity—in short, their appeal to human dreams of controlling nature. She also considers how they reinforced Cold War assumptions of Western economic and material superiority. Though the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* and the rise of environmentalism might have marked a turning point in Americans’ faith in pesticides, statistics tell a different story. *Pesticides, a Love Story* recounts the campaign against DDT that famously ensued; but the book also shows where our notions of *Silent Spring*’s revolutionary impact falter—where, in spite of a ban on DDT, farm use of pesticides in the United States more than doubled in the thirty years after the book was published. As a cultural survey of popular and political attitudes toward pesticides, *Pesticides, a Love Story* tries to make sense of this seeming paradox. At heart, it is an exploration of the story we tell ourselves about the costs and benefits of pesticides—and how corporations, government officials, ordinary citizens, and the press shape that story to reflect our ideals, interests, and emotions.

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Customer Reviews

"Overall, *Pesticides, A Love Story* concludes convincingly that American desires to control and dominate nature, as well as an inability to move beyond immediate, short-term decisions, heavily influenced attitudes about pesticides." [Reviews in American History](#) "An excellent example of cultural and environmental history and a must read for any student of postwar American environmentalism or postwar US culture in general." [Environmental History](#) "An excellent contribution to the growing body of scholarship on synthetic pesticides." [American Historical Review](#) "Beyond its accessibility to a broad spectrum of readers, *Pesticides, a Love Story* offers an impressive breadth of coverage, with sections devoted to the assessment of herbicides, Integrated Pest Management, endocrine disrupters, organic foods, and GMOs, all in addition to the familiar topics like the role of DDT in controlling malaria during WWII." [H-Net Reviews](#) "Provides a detailed history of the global love affair with technology in general and pesticides in particular. . . . A useful and objective if not dispassionate and comprehensive account." [Choice](#) "Why did pesticide use soar despite warnings of costs? Michelle Mart suggests that the answer lies in the stories Americans have told themselves about progress, modernity, and better living through chemistry. Did love for these ideals blind Americans to flaws in the objects of their affection? Read this book to find out." [Edmund Russell](#), author of *War and Nature: Fighting Humans and Insects with Chemicals from World War I to Silent Spring* "Pesticides, a Love Story offers a rich narrative describing how chemical pesticides became so ubiquitous in American culture and the global environment. Astute and dogged research make for a conceptually strong synthesis, which reveals the roots of the American love affair with chemical pesticides, while chronicling how this affection grew over time." [David Kinkela](#), author of *DDT and the American Century: Global Health, Environmental Politics, and the Pesticide That Changed the World*

Michelle Mart is associate professor of history at Penn State University. She is the author of *Eye on*

Israel: How America Came to View Israel as an Ally.

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