

Weed Management

One way that gardeners define a weed is “a plant growing where it is not wanted”, so realistically, this can be a purchased flower that has gotten out of control and is seeding and growing all over the garden. One way to avoid this situation is to do a little research before planting. Be aware of the words “will grow anywhere, aggressive, easy to grow”, etc. Also, when a friend offers you a start of a plant from her garden, ask some questions before you accept it.

A plant can also be one person’s weed but another person’s garden plant. For example, most people consider the dandelion an undesirable weed but it can also be made into an excellent wine or a nutritious salad. Some weeds have been used for herbal and medicinal purposes since medieval times. A good example is St. Johns Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), which is listed as a noxious weed in the State of Washington but its extract is used today for medicinal purposes.



There are numerous landscape, lawn/turf and garden weeds that the homeowner must contend with. But first and foremost, the homeowner should ask the question “How many weeds am I willing to live with?” Sometimes a few weeds can be managed using cultivation practices rather than going to the local lawn and garden or hardware center to purchase the latest, greatest pesticide. Also, usually spot-treating individual weeds rather than spraying every bit of the landscape is the best way to handle a weed problem.

A good weed management tool is starting out right in the first place. When preparing a new flower or shrub bed or a new garden spot, take care of existing weeds before any planting is initiated (patience, patience). Anytime the soil is disturbed, i.e. rototilling or digging, the potential is there to bring dormant weed seeds to the surface, promoting their germination. If this is dealt with at the beginning, a lot of headache will be avoided in the future. Also, consider adding organic material such as compost or soil amendments before planting. This will get your new plants off to a better start and give them the potential to compete against the weeds that do come up. It is also easier to pull weeds from a good fluffy soil than hard, packed soil.



Another key to good weed management is vigilance. Take a daily stroll through your landscape and pluck a few weeds while smelling the roses. This is not only relaxing, but also good exercise. You will also get a head start on any major weed invasions because you can deal with the problem before it gets out of hand. If you wait too long, the task can seem too large and daunting to deal with. It’s easier to pull a few spikes of grass in the flower bed before the whole bed looks like it needs to be mowed.

Identification is another important key to weed management. Determine if the plant is an annual or a perennial. What are the conditions that it prefers, i.e. poor or rich soil, dry or moist conditions? How does the plant reproduce in the landscape environment, i.e. propagation by seed or underground runners? When is the best time in its life cycle to effectively manage this particular weed? Getting to know the plant will help you understand why you got the weed in the first place. It will also help determine the best line of defense against this particular plant; for instance, whether to use cultural or herbicide control?



There are several resources available to help with weed identification and control. The Master Gardener Center has resource materials and fact sheets available within the Center itself as well as on the website. Located within the Extension Education Center at 222 N Havana Street, Spokane, WA, are several other resources, including the Extension Small Farms and Weed Management program.

Also located within this building are the Spokane County Noxious Weed Board and the State of Washington Department of Agriculture-Pesticide Management, which are good sources for noxious weed management and pesticide compliance information. The internet is also a valuable resource, especially the many extension and university sites.

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Vi Tiegs, revised September 2007