

# Dealing with Weeds

*Most weeds are immigrants. They are non-native, and naturalized in the garden, having successfully adapted to being ripped up, grazed, and mown for over a thousand years. They are the most tenacious of plants. Weeds are the plants which we do not grow in our gardens. They are unplanned, usually unnoticed, and to the gardener, in the wrong place.*

If there's a bare spot in your garden, a weed seed will find it. Weeds aren't bad plants, they're just plants growing where you don't want them to. Some weeds are easily removed by hand and others are persistent about growing back and become more and more difficult to eradicate the longer they are left to establish themselves and spread.

## Annual versus Perennial Weeds

Annual weeds can be the toughest weeds to control for several reasons:

- They spread throughout your garden by seed, many producing hundreds of seeds per plant. Often these seeds are too small to be easily seen.
- Annual weeds are super competitors, and will out compete crops for nutrients, space, light and nutrients.
- They may self-seed or they may be brought into the garden by birds, 4-legged animals, dirty tools, or by sticking to your clothing as you walk by.
- Seeds of annual weeds are usually already found in the soil, and have long life spans.
- All unsterilized soil contains weed seeds. Any time new soil amendments are added to the garden, you may be introducing new and different kinds of weeds.

Examples of annual weeds include: bindweed, chickweed, crab grass, knotweed, lambs-quarters, mallow, pigweed, purple deadnettle, groundsel, nettle (common), purslane, speedwell, spurge and yellow oxalis.

Just as with other plants, there are weeds that favor cool weather and cool-season annual weeds, and there are warm-season annual weeds.

The only way to get control of annual weeds is to get rid of them before they go to seed again. Luckily annual weeds are very often shallow rooted and can be

hand pulled or cut off with a hoe. It is important to just skim the surface when using a hoe, since most annual weeds are shallow rooted. If you go deeper, you risk turning up seeds that were buried under the soil and will now begin to grow!

Hopefully, you will see less and less annual weeds as the season goes along, but new seeds will always find their way in and some seeds remain dormant in the soil until ideal conditions present themselves and they germinate, so weeding is an ongoing process. If you can get in the habit of doing a little weeding each time you work in your garden, it won't become an overwhelming task.

Perennial weeds can also be difficult to get rid of because:

- They spread by both seed and creeping roots. If you don't pull the entire root, the plant can actually reproduce from every little root piece left behind.
- Many perennial weeds have roots which grow very deep, and some have a central, hard to remove taproot. This means hoeing and tilling are not good choices for removing perennial weeds. Hand weeding will work if you are very thorough about getting the whole plant and root system.
- Many grasses are labeled as perennial weeds. Their roots can spread for feet, if not removed when small.
- Like annuals, perennial weeds also rob desired plants of nutrients and space.

Examples of perennial weeds include: quack grass, bindweed, burdock, dandelion, dock, ground ivy, horsetail, Japanese knotweed, plantain, poison ivy, purslane, thistle, and ragweed.

Tip: If you can handle the cold, perennial weeds pull out most easily in the early spring, when the ground has recently thawed.

*The use of herbicides in a home garden isn't recommended, since there is such a variety of plants growing in a small place, and different kinds of crops utilize different kinds of herbicides.*