

Helpline Hot Topic for February 2021

Weeds, Glorious Weeds

by Cynthia Zimmerman

“They turn up at the same time of the year, every year, like garrulous relatives you wished lived just a little further away.” - Richard Mabey,

Weeds: How Vagabond Plants Gatecrashed Civilisation and Changed the Way We Think About Nature

Weed by definition: a plant growing where it's not wanted.

Recently, after having taken the great Weed Refresher Course presented by Michael Harman MG, I was out turning my compost bin and noticed, much to my dismay, that my vegetable bed was covered with green weed sprouts, and I do mean covered. I thought “surely it's too soon” but with our crazy weather, apparently it's not. I don't think these are what we conventionally call weeds but seedlings from the neighbors' Chinese elm that has been so generous in sharing its seed. Still they do fit the definition.

No matter our gardening habits, weeds can enter our gardens in any number of ways without us even realizing or thinking about it.

- Blow or drop in uninvited from sources such as trees, weeds in the neighbors' yard, scattered seed from bird feeders, birds and squirrels burying their treasures, or on our shoes and clothes.
- Come in the containers of plants you purchase from nurseries and plant sales or from another's yard when they share a plant with us.
- Soil additions such as potting media, top soil, compost, or non-composted manures, particularly if they haven't been heated above 158° F when processed; even then, seeds such as California burclover (*Medicago polymorpha*), creeping sorrel (*Oxalis corniculata*), and cheeseweed (*Malva* spp.) can remain viable.
- Tools that are used elsewhere but not cleaned thoroughly before being brought into your garden such as lawnmowers, rototillers, even wheelbarrows, shovels, rakes, and hoes.

Another source of weeds is the “seed bank” of ungerminated but viable seeds in the soil. Many weeds are capable of depositing thousands, even millions of seeds, in a growing season if they aren't removed before setting seed. The seed from annual weeds such as chickweed (*Stellaria media*) and annual blue or meadow grass (*Poa annua*) usually stay within the top inch of the soil and easily germinate each year. With perennial weeds such as bermudagrass (*Cynodon dactylon*), dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) and nutsedge (*Cyperus* spp.) you not only have seeds that are deposited in the soil that can germinate years later but also taproots, crown roots, bulbs, rhizomes, corms, stolons or tubers under the ground that continue to produce new plants each year.

Weeds are The NeverEnding Story in our landscapes. We can pull, hoe, mow, mulch, lay weed cloth, burn, solarize, and spray but inevitably a weed will pop up. In order to most effectively deal with weeds we need to know our enemy. What's its name? Is it annual, biennial, or perennial? Summer or winter weed? Can it be dealt with effectively without herbicides? When and how? If herbicide is necessary, then should it be a pre-emergent or post-emergent? When and how?

In order to help you answer these questions, here are some very helpful websites:

Weed Management Guidelines – before and after planting

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7441.html>

Pests in Gardens, Turf, and Landscapes - weeds listed by common names

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/menu.weeds.html>

Introduction to the Weed Photo Gallery – helps you define type of weed

http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/weeds_intro.html

Weed Identification: Photo Gallery – by name of weed

http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/weeds_all.html

Aquatic Weeds: Photos

http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/WEEDS/aquatic_gallery.html

Broadleaf Weeds: Photos

http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/WEEDS/broad_preview.html

Grass Weeds: Photos

http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/WEEDS/grass_preview.html

Sedge Weeds: Photos

http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/WEEDS/sedge_gallery.html

General Methods of Weed Management

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/r280700211.html>

Soil Solarization

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74145.html>

Weed Control Using Herbicides

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/QT/weedcontrolcard.html>

Lawn Weeds : Key to Identifying

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/TOOLS/TURF/PESTS/weedkey.html>

Healthy Lawns – Herbicides

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/TOOLS/TURF/PESTS/weedherb.html?printpage>

“We may think that we are nurturing our garden, but of course it is our garden that is nurturing us”

--Jenny Uglow, OBE, British biographer, historian, critic and publisher