



Creative Gardener FYI

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In Defense of Weeds

Weeds...the curse of all gardeners. In fact every garden has them and no gardener from beginner to professional is immune from having weeds in the garden. It comes down to how you defend your garden from them that gives you the upper hand. Weeds compete with garden plants for sun, water and nutrients, some of the more aggressive weeds can literally take over and strangle off ornamental plants. Getting ahead of weeds and staying on with good upkeep and management is the best plan of attack. Identify problem weeds, in your garden; know their life-cycles such as perennial or annual. One of the best weed control management is to do a combination of things, good site preparation, mechanical control, and suppression.

Site prep

In new planting areas where weeds are present, control all weeds, especially perennial ones, by removing them BEFORE doing any planting or adding soil amendments. Weeds like blackberries and scotch broom can be really tough to remove from planting beds without disturbing the good plants, so do the best job possible ahead of time. At planting time with a weed free bed, plant abundantly. Weeds love to take over open spaces, so give them competition with the desired plants and good use of groundcover. Rich amended soil conditions and abundant planting will go a long way in on-going weed control.

Mechanical

Mechanical is just a fancy way to say hand-pulling. Dig, hoe, pull, yank, scrape, you name it, all the ways to physically get rid of them. This type of control works well on young annual weeds. Absolutely get them out before they flower and set seed to avoid future generations. For example, when you see a bright cheerful dandelion in the lawn, don't pass by, pull it. Within a day it could be blowing fluffy seed heads all over the place. After pulling weeds or tilling the soil, check back every 2 to 3 weeks to catch any weed seeds or perennial weeds that have been brought to the surface.

Suppression

Just what the word means...smother them, take away what they need to thrive. This is best done by the use of mulch. Both organic and in-organic can be used. Organic mulch is mulch made of natural or decomposable substances such as bark, wood chips, leaves, newspaper, or compost. A 3 to 4 inch layer is the best depth to deprive weeds of light. Use a coarse textured type of mulch for best results. Mulches that are too fine will decompose too rapidly and not maintain a good suppression depth, while mulches that are too thick stay wet in rainy periods and tend to create a layer in top of the soil that will capture weeds. Inorganic mulches such as gravel, pebbles, black plastic and landscape fabrics, do not decompose. The best choices of inorganic mulches allow passage of water and air for healthy plant growth in ornamental beds. Stay away from black plastic. The harm it causes is more work in the long run than the year of weed suppression it gives. Go for design with the use of rock and gravel mulches and consider it a permanent part of the look of the garden. Use landscape fabrics in areas where there are little or no plantings, such as pathways. Plant health is better with the use of healthy, organic mulch in and around planting beds.

Weed control in new planting beds and neglected yards takes diligence and work. Tailor a weed management program to your own garden by using the above tips. You will find even after one season of attentiveness to weeds and as desired plantings mature, weed problems will become less and less.