

Controlling Weeds in the Garden



Weeds in the home garden can reduce the attractiveness of a landscape, compete with desirable crops, be a source for allergy or poison for humans or animals, or harbor diseases, rodents and insect pests.

How to Control Weeds

- Know your weeds to identify the most effective ways to control them. Some weeds propagate by seeds, so the key is to remove them before they set seeds. Others spread by underground runners which require digging up their roots or killing them with systemic herbicide. Some spread by both.
- Exclude weeds by closely examining items you bring into the garden. This may include plants, compost, and soil. Be on the lookout for creeping weeds from neighboring yards.
- Use cultural and mechanical controls
- Weed early and often so they do not get a foothold. Keep weeds from going to seed.
- Rotate vegetable plants
- Plant cover crops in the vegetable garden
- Mulch areas between plants with common organic mulches like arborist chips, shredded bark or leaves, compost, and newspapers.
- Water only desired plants, using drip irrigation or targeted hand watering, to reduce weed growth.
- Apply herbicides as a last resort. Be sure to follow instructions on the label. A quick guide to some terminologies:
 - ◇ Pre-emergent herbicides are used before weeds sprout.
 - ◇ Post-emergent herbicides are used after weeds are up.
 - ◇ Selective herbicides control certain plants and not others.
 - ◇ Non-selective herbicides potentially can damage many types of plants.
 - ◇ Systemic herbicides move from the point of initial application to other parts of the plant.
 - ◇ Non-systemic or contact herbicides affect only the part of the plant they touch.

Common Weeds in Our Region

- **Annual Bluegrass (*Poa annua*) — Annual**

Annual bluegrass has flattened stems that are erect or spreading. They are 2 to 12 inches long, sometimes forming dense clumps. The flowering and seed production period is March to August. Control: Hoe or hand pull before seeds form. Hard to control in lawns.



- **Crabgrass (*Digitaria ischaemum*) — Annual**

Crabgrass is a common weed in vegetable gardens, landscape beds, and gravel driveways. It is a low growing, summer annual grass that spreads by seed and from occasional rooting of the lowest joints of the stems. Control: Control before it sets seed. Hand-remove the clump including roots.



- **Creeping Buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*) – Perennial**

This competitive plant grows up to one foot tall, spreads by runners and seed and forms thick carpets on wet, poorly drained soils everywhere. Leaves are dark green with light patches and are divided into three toothed leaflets. Flowers are glossy, bright yellow. *Control:* In lawns, improve drainage, avoid compaction, and promote healthy grass by overseeding and fertilizing as needed. Hand remove all of the runners, roots and growing points. Doing so between fall and spring, when soil is moist, is most effective.



Photo: King County, Washington

- **Curly Dock (*Rumex crispus* L.) - Perennial**

This robust tap-rooted perennial grows to 2 – 5 feet tall and has large, mostly basal, leaves with curly or wavy margins. Curly dock can generate a new plant from a small piece of cut root. Prolific seeder. *Control:* Dig up the entire root (may be difficult) before it goes to seed. Check for new growth from root remnants and continue to remove new plants.



Photo: Oregon State University

- **Dandelion (*Asteraceae*) – Perennial**

Dandelion is a perennial with small yellow flowers on top of a stalk. It thrives in moist sites. *Control:* Hand remove the entire tap root, which can be deep and branching, before plant goes to seed. In lawns, follow up by seeding the area to minimize weed incursion in bare ground.



Photo: Oregon State University

- **English Ivy (*Hedera helix*) - Perennial**

English ivy reproduces by seed and by stolon. Stems growing up trees will form fruits which can be spread by birds. *Control:* Hand dig or pull. Cut ivy plants already in trees at waist height and dig up the roots.



Photo: Oregon State University

- **Field Bindweed/Morning Glory (*Convolvulus arvensis* L.) - Perennial**

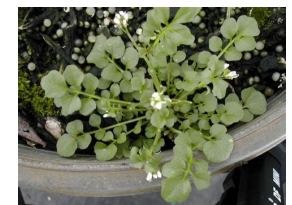
Field bindweed often forms dense tangled mats of arrowhead-shaped leaves and bell-shaped, white to pinkish flowers. Long, deep taproot can reach a depth of 10 feet with running roots rootstocks closer to the surface. Seeds remain viable for up to 50 years. *Control:* Hand pull top growth weekly (or more often), pull rootstocks where possible, and don't let it go to seed. Spray systemic herbicide in late summer to early fall.



Photo: Oregon State University

- **Little Bittercress (*Cardamine oligosperma*) – Winter Annual or biennial**

Plants range from 3 to 12 inches tall, with branched, smooth stems emerging from the soil line. Leaves radiate from the base of the stem to form a rosette. Small white flowers on stalks. When seed pods mature, seeds are “shot off” to several yards away. *Control:* Hand remove before seeds form. Apply a 2 to 3-inch layer of mulch in infested area in late summer to suppress seeds from germination.



- **Clover (*Trifolium*, *Medicago*, and *Melilotus*) – Some annual, some perennial**

All clovers have tap roots and clover-shape leaves. Creeping forms can spread into large patches. *Control*: Hand remove the tap roots before they go to seed. Seeds have hard protective covers and can be difficult to kill; apply mulch to suppress germination.



- **Quackgrass (*Elytrigia repens*) - Perennial**

Quackgrass is erect, can form clumps, and grows to almost 4 feet. Reproduces by seeds and with underground, creeping stems (rhizomes). *Control*: Increase nitrogen fertilization and mowing. It is very difficult to remove by mechanical means.



Resources

Greenstreet Steward Weed Identification Guide <https://www.portland.gov/bes/green-street-stewards/documents/green-street-steward-weed-identification-guide/download>

Effective solutions for Pacific Northwest weeds, including invasive trees & bushes. Oregon State University <https://solvepestproblems.oregonstate.edu/weeds>

This handout is adapted from "10 Weeds to Know," presented by 10-Minute-University™ Clackamas County Master Gardener Association.

More information

