

Frequently asked Questions about Weeds

Q: Why do I have so many weeds in my yard?

A: Some combination of the following factors will contribute to high weed populations:

- A large number of weed seeds or propagules was brought in from another source such as soil amendments, mulches or blown in from bordering areas.
- Your landscape design contains many bare spots that provide good places for weeds to get established. Plant a competitive landscape with no bare spots. Cover bare areas with mulches.
- Your lawn is weak, has thin areas and can't out compete weeds. You need to take steps to make your lawn more vigorous.
- You haven't been keeping on top of your weed populations. You need to control weeds when they are little before they go to seed or develop underground propagules.

Q: How do I identify my weed species?

A: Use a key to weeds.

- There is a good key to weeds in turf in the Healthy Lawns web site.
- If you have an idea of what your weed is, you can review it on the Weed Gallery at the UC IPM web site at www.ipm.ucdavis.edu.
- You can also get help from your local UC Cooperative Extension office.

Q: Why is it important to know what weed species I have?

A: It is necessary to know what weed you have so that you can choose the best management practice. Some weeds are more aggressive than others and may become more difficult to control once they mature. Many species are indicators of an underlying cultural problem in your landscape. For example, nutsedge is often an indication of overwatering.

Q: Why is it important to know if a weed is an annual or a perennial?

A: Knowing the life cycle of the weed helps you choose appropriate management methods.

- Annual weeds are easier to control than perennials because they just live for one season and spread by seed.
- Perennial weeds are much harder to control because they produce seeds and also can spread by tubers, underground stems (rhizomes) or aboveground stems (stolons).
- It is really important to prevent the establishment of perennial weeds. Once they become established, they are difficult to control because of their underground food reserves.

Q: What are the differences between crabgrass and dallisgrass?

A: Crabgrass and dallisgrass are both commonly found in lawns and ornamental plantings and can be confused. However, they are different and require different management strategies.

- Crabgrass is an annual weed and spreads primarily by seeds. Crabgrass is fairly easy to control and can be removed before seeds form to reduce spread.
- Dallisgrass is a perennial and spreads by seeds and by underground stems (rhizomes). Dallisgrass is much harder to control than crabgrass and should be dug out before it can spread. Once rhizomes form, it is often hard to remove the entire plant.
- For more information on these two weeds, refer to the Pest Note series on the UC IPM Web Site.

Q: How often should I weed my yard?

A: Frequently. The most effective way to keep weed populations down is to remove weeds as soon as you see them and before they mature and set seed.

Q: How do I solarize my soil?

A: For a detailed discussion of soil solarization, see:

Elmore, C.L., J.J. Stapleton, C.E. Bell, and J.E. DeVay. 1997. *Soil Solarization: A Nonpesticidal Method for Controlling Diseases, Nematodes, and Weeds*. Oakland: Univ. Calif. Agric. Nat. Res. Publ. 21377.

- Cover soil with clear plastic (1.5 to 2 mils thick) during the hottest part of the year.
- Level the soil and prepare for planting.
- Wet the soil and roll the tarp over the surface, smoothing out any air pockets.
- Bury the edges of the tarp beneath the soil.
- Do not leave the tarp on for more than 6 to 7 weeks, as it will become brittle and difficult to remove.
- Remove the tarp before planting.

Q: What are some good competitive groundcover plants that will shade out weeds?

A: Some groundcovers and shrubs that need little or no irrigation once established include bush monkeyflower, California buckwheat, California fuchsia, dwarf coyote brush, sage, silver bush lupine, yarrow, yucca, California wild rose, ceanothus, wild lilac, coffeeberry, gooseberry, toyon, and western redbud. You can also contact your local UC Cooperative Extension Office for more information.

Q: What is the best-sized mulch to use in my landscape?

A: Moderate-sized mulches are best (about 3/4"). Very large mulches are not generally used for weed control and very fine mulches are not very effective because weeds can blow in and easily become established.

Q: How often should I replenish mulch?

A: Mulch should be replaced when the mulch layer becomes too thin or washes away. Keep mulches at a depth of about 2 to 4 inches.

Q: How safe is it to use wood chips as mulch for weed control? Will they burn? Bring in disease?

A: Wood chips are safe to use, however, you can start a fire if you use a propane torch for weed control near them. Hand-weed or use other tools near wood chips. Because wood chips and other organic mulches hold in moisture, keep them away from the base of trees and shrubs to reduce the risk of damage from disease.

Q: How long will synthetic mulches last?

A: Synthetic mulches or landscape fabrics vary in how long they remain effective. Depending on the product, materials may last anywhere from 6 months to more than 5 years. Synthetic mulches last longer if a top mulch is placed on them.

Q: How do I remove weeds between brickwork in the garden?

A: Hand-weeding is probably the safest and most effective method. A weed knife or screwdriver may help get the roots.

Q: How do I remove nutsedge (nutgrass) in a planter?

A: Refer to the Nutsedge Pest Note on the UC IPM Web Site.

- Pull nutsedge plants out by hand or cultivate with a hoe.
- Be sure to dig down deep enough to remove the entire plant, including the tubers.

Q: How do I remove patches of bermudagrass?

A: Bermudagrass is very difficult to control. You can manage it with a combination of hand-weeding, mulching, solarization, and careful timing of herbicides. For more specific information, refer to the Bermudagrass Pest Note on the UC IPM Web Site.

Q: Is there a spray to kill bermudagrass in the lawn that will not kill the desirable grass?

A: In cool-season turfgrasses (annual and perennial ryegrasses, bentgrasses, fine and tall fescues, and Kentucky bluegrass), triclopyr (Weed-B-Gon, Turflon) can be used to suppress bermudagrass. For fescue turfgrasses only, fluazifop (Fusilade) is available to control bermudagrass. Be sure to follow label directions carefully to avoid injury to the turfgrass. Check out the Bermudagrass Pest Note on the UC IPM Web Site for more information.

Q: How do I get rid of bamboo?

A: Bamboo is often desired as an ornamental planting, but many types of bamboo can be quite invasive. They spread by sending out underground rhizomes and sending out new shoots around the original plant. Bamboo can grow beneath pavement and become a weed in nearby plantings.

- Removing the invading bamboo takes patience.
- You need to cut down all the canes and shoots.
- You may need to do this several times over a year or two before the bamboo dies.
- You can try to keep the bamboo from spreading by creating a barrier around the bamboo plant that extends at least 18 inches below the surface of the soil.

Q: How do I find information about controlling other specific weeds such as yellow starthistle, dodder, and many others?

A: See the Pest Note series on the UC IPM web site where you will find weed management information for more than 20 individual weed species.

Q: Is there any product besides glyphosate (Roundup) that I can spray on my weeds?

A: There are many herbicide products available with different active ingredients.

- Glyphosate (sold as Roundup and other trade names) is just one widely advertised product. It is a broad-spectrum herbicide that kills virtually any plant it contacts.
- Other herbicides are selective and can be used around some growing plants (but are injurious to others). However, with these products, you need to know what weed species you are trying to control and choose a product with an active ingredient that will control the weed species causing your problems.
- Go to specific weed Pest Notes for more information on herbicides. But remember for many landscapes, the easiest, most effective and least risky way to manage weeds is with nonchemical control methods.

Q: What is the best lawn weed killer?

A: This really depends on the weed problem you have and the tolerance of your turfgrass species. Refer to the Weed Management in Lawns Pest Note on the UC IPM web site for information about specific products. Remember that your best defense against weeds in lawns is a vigorous lawn. Applying herbicides may provide short-term control of weeds, but if your lawn does not grow to fill in the dead spots, weeds will return.

Q. Are herbicides necessary for growing an attractive lawn?

A. Absolutely not. If you choose your turf species well, prepare your site, keep your lawn growing vigorously with correct watering, fertilizing and mowing practices and rapidly pull out weeds as soon as they invade, you should not need herbicides.

Q: Is there a weed killer to use around my vegetables?

A: Herbicide use should be avoided in the home vegetable garden.

- Herbicides can injure your vegetable plants because many weed species are related to crop plants.
- It is much easier and safer to pull weeds by hand.
- Also some herbicides may leave residues in the soil and affect the growth of a following crop.
- If herbicides are absolutely necessary, spot treatments of glyphosate (Roundup) may be the safest option.

Q: What can weed-and-feed products be used on?

A: Weed-and-feed products are lawn fertilizers that also contain herbicides.

- These products should be avoided unless absolutely necessary and should not be used every time you fertilize.
- Herbicides should be applied only when there are high numbers of weeds and products and application timing must be chosen carefully.
- Sometimes the active ingredient in the weed-and-feed product will not be effective against the weed species present or are preemergent herbicides that are not effective after weeds have emerged.

Q: Why are weed-and-feed products damaging to tree roots? Are they absorbed through the trunk or tree foliage or only the roots?

A: Some weed-and-feed products that contain herbicides such as dicamba and triclopyr can be absorbed by tree roots growing in lawns and cause trees to become dwarfed or distorted if they are applied too close to the tree drip line. Other weed-and-feed products that contain 2,4-D can cause injury to trees and shrubs if it drifts onto leaves. Always read the product label before applying the product.

Q: Can the same sprayer be used for glyphosate (Roundup) and insecticides?

A: No, use a separate sprayer for herbicides and a separate one for insecticides. Even though you may rinse the herbicide out after use, some residue can remain and cause injury to other areas of your garden or landscape if mixed with an insecticide and sprayed on desirable plants.

Q: Can I use vinegar as an herbicide?

A: Some weed control products contain acetic acid, or vinegar, and are marketed as herbicides.

- Research has shown that 5 to 7% vinegar (such as household vinegar) products don't produce reliable control.
- At 10 to 20% vinegar concentrations, certain annual weeds can be controlled, however, products labeled for use at this concentration are not currently registered for home use. In addition, these high concentrations would be hazardous.
- Concentrations over 11% can cause burns to skin and eye injury.

Q: What about corn gluten meal?

A: Corn gluten meal is a fine yellow powder that is a waste product left over from the processing of corn.

- It has high nitrogen content and can be top-dressed onto established turfgrass.
- It has no effect on already emerged weeds but may prevent the emergence of some weeds when applied at high rates.
- Research results are not consistent and its use is not recommended by the University of California for weed control.