

# Home & Garden Pest Newsletter

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## Tools for Removing Dandelions and Other Weeds

**D**andelions can be an especially troublesome weed in lawns and landscapes. Once they're established, dandelions readily regrow from their deep taproot when only the tops are removed or mowed. Dandelions can regrow if even 1 inch of the taproot remains. The best way to get rid of dandelions is to control them when they are young, removing the whole plant, taproot and all.

Specialized tools for removing individual weeds and their roots are great nonchemical choices for gardeners who are looking for alternatives to herbicides. Many different styles are available on the market. This article details UC IPM testing of several handheld and long-handled dandelion removal tools. Tools were rated for their ease of use, soil displacement, and weed removal ability of mature dandelions in moderately moist soil. A summary of observations is below; see Tables 1 and 2 for comments and rating on each tool.

### Long-handled tools

Several different long-handled tools (Figure 1) were tested and rated for their efficacy on removing both the weed and the taproot. For ease of use, styles such as the Speedy Weedy Weed Puller performed the best. These tools have nail like tines that go into the soil to grab the weed and a retractable plunger that shoots the weed off the end for easy disposal. You often don't even get your hands dirty.

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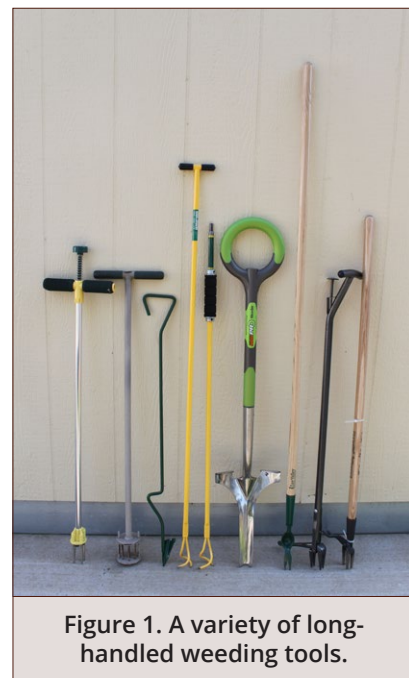


Figure 1. A variety of long-handled weeding tools.




K Windbiel-Rojas, UC IPM



Figure 2. Hole left by a long-handled tool with nail-like tines.

K Windbiel-Rojas, UC IPM

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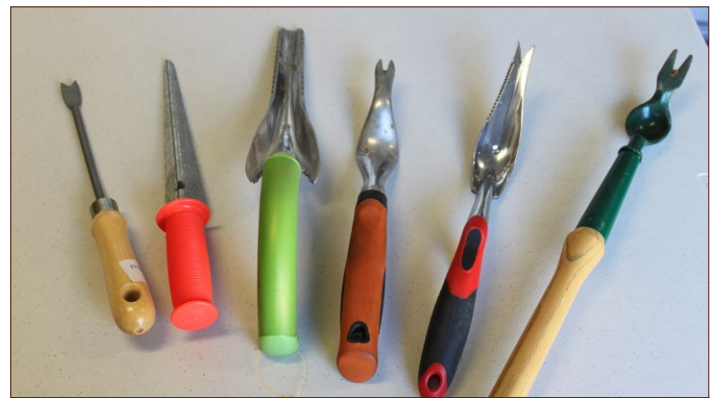
# Dandelion Tools continued from p. 1

**Table 1. Dandelion long-handled tool rating. Ratings, with 5 being excellent and 1 being poor, are based on ease of use, removal of the dandelion along with its taproot, and removal of weeds other than dandelion.**

Long-handled Tool	Ease	Removes Dandelion	Other Weeds	Advantages	Disadvantages
Radius 205 PRO Weeder	4	5	3	Easy to get entire taproot. Sturdy design, ergonomic grip.	Tool is like a shovel. Disturbs lawn when extracting weeds. Still have to bend down to get out dandelion.
Grampa's Weeder Tool	5	4	3	Almost no bending required.	Doesn't work very well on smaller dandelion plants.
Lee Valley Dandelion Digger 60 inch	2	3	2	Sturdy design with fulcrum for leverage.	Taproot isn't consistently removed. Long handle makes difficult to use.
Speedy Weedy Weed Puller	5	3	5	Can shoot weed off end with plunger. Great for shallow-rooted weeds. Lightweight.	Doesn't get entire taproot. Leaves large hole. If metal tines get bent, plunger doesn't work well.
Ergonica Weed Twister	3	2	3	Great for shallow-rooted weeds.	Doesn't get entire taproot. Leaves large hole. Best for large weeds.
Weed Twister	2	1	2	Can operate with one hand.	Leaves hole in ground. Must dig out weed and dirt clod from tool end. Doesn't always get taproot. Handle is awkward. Not readily available.

One drawback of these tools is that they take a large divot out of the area where the weed is removed, which is especially noticeable in lawns (Figure 2). You might need to top dress or fill with soil to replace the hole left behind. Also, the tines on these tools didn't always remove the entire dandelion taproot. They did, however, successfully remove many other types of shallow-rooted weeds.

The long-handled tools that consistently removed the dandelion along with its taproot include: Grampa's Weeder Tool, Rocket Weeder, and Radius Pro Weeder. Grampa's Tool is a popular design carried by many garden centers, while the Rocket Weeder may only be available online. For these tools, you step on a lever, rock the handle forward to clamp onto the weed, then gently pull it out. The Rocket Weeder also has a plunger for easy weed disposal. The Radius Pro Weeder, available in some stores, looks and performs like a slim shovel, and



**Figure 3. From left: Dandelion fork/knife, Diggit, Radius Hand Weeder, A.M. Leonard dandelion fork, Corona dandelion fork, and Lee Valley Dandelion Digger 24 inch.**

although it does lift up a chunk of soil, it allows you to get under the taproot to easily remove the whole weed. Stomp down the chunk of soil when finished.

*continued on page 3*





# Dandelion Tools continued from p. 2

**Table 2. Dandelion hand tool rating.** Ratings, with 5 being excellent and 1 being poor, are based on ease of use, removal of the dandelion along with its taproot, and removal of weeds other than dandelion.

Hand Tool	Ease	Removes Dandelion	Other Weeds	Advantages	Disadvantages
Diggit	5	5	4	Goes deep into soil to get entire taproot. Sturdy construction.	Handle is soft but not ergonomic.
Radius 102 NRG Hand Weeder	5	5	4	Goes deep into soil to get entire taproot. Sturdy construction. Comfortable, ergonomic grip.	May not be suitable for all types of weeds.
Leonard Weeder	5	4	3	Sturdy design. Good leverage from fulcrum.	Entire taproot isn't consistently removed.
Lee Valley Dandelion Digger 24 inch	4	3	3	Sturdy design. Good leverage from fulcrum.	Entire taproot isn't consistently removed.
Dandelion fork (common model)	4	2	3	Inexpensive. Carried by most stores. Long handle to get down into soil.	Poor grip. No leverage. Fork isn't usually good enough to pull out taproot. More effort to remove other weeds.
Corona dandelion fork	3	2	3	Sturdy design. Good leverage from fulcrum.	Entire taproot isn't consistently removed.

## Hand-held tools

Some gardeners may prefer a smaller handheld weeding tool (Figure 3). These are inexpensive and take up less space in the toolshed, and they don't generally disturb the soil or lawn as much as some of the long-handled tools.

Many hand tools have a forked end that helps grab the base of the dandelion to pull out the entire plant. Styles, grips, cost, and effectiveness vary greatly. We found the best ones had a small fork or even no fork, a fulcrum portion for leverage (the curve between the fork and the handle), and a comfortable handle grip. The best performers in our study were the Radius Hand Weeder and the Diggit tool, because they allow you to get deep into the soil to loosen the taproot for easy removal. Most of the hand-held tools worked fine, but some required more effort to get the weed and taproot out.

## Choose a tool that suits you

All the tools tested had advantages and disadvantages. The main considerations in choosing which

tool to use are how much effort is required, whether the weed is adequately removed, and personal preference. Tools with long handles require less bending over and time on your knees, reducing possible back and joint pain. Handheld tools might give you more control and allow you to get your hands dirty, which many gardeners enjoy!

## Preventing future weed problems

It's hard to prevent new infestations since dandelions spread via windborne seeds. Controlling these and other weeds before they set seed will reduce future weed problems. For a list of resources about weed identification, prevention, and control in gardens and landscapes, see the UC IPM website at [ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/menu.weeds.html](http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/menu.weeds.html).

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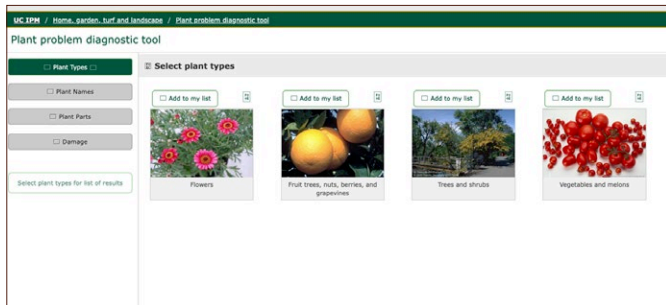


# What's Wrong with My Plant?

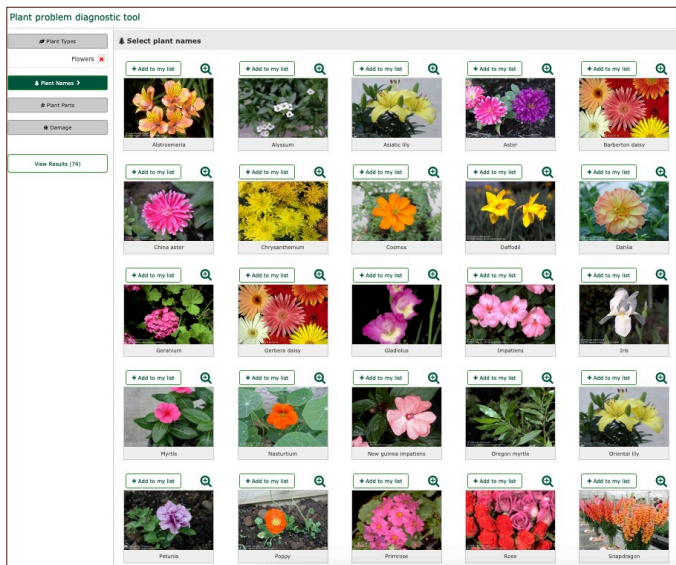
**W**hen you spot a plant in your garden that doesn't look healthy, how do you figure out what's wrong with it? Plant problems can be caused by insects, mites, vertebrates, environmental conditions, and diseases, but it can sometimes be hard to tell which is causing the problem.

UC IPM's Plant Problem Diagnostic Tool [ipm.ucanr.edu/home-and-landscape/plant-problem-diagnostic-tool/](http://ipm.ucanr.edu/home-and-landscape/plant-problem-diagnostic-tool/) can help you find out what's wrong with unhealthy-looking plants in the landscape or garden. This tool shows various types of damage for specific plants, and what can cause the damage.

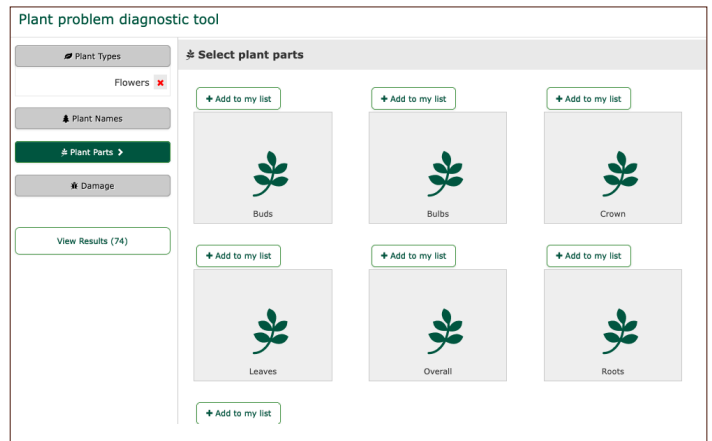
1. Start by choosing the plant type: flowers; fruit trees, nuts, berries, and grapevines; ornamental trees and shrubs; or vegetables and melons.



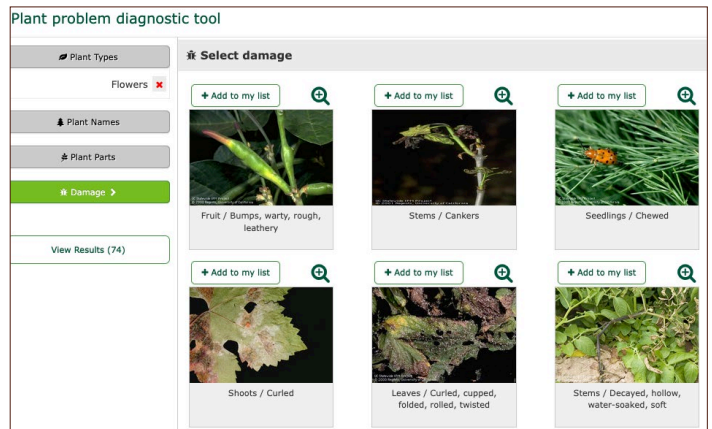
2. Next, choose the specific crop or plant species. Many commonly grown plant species are included from Abelia to Zinnia.



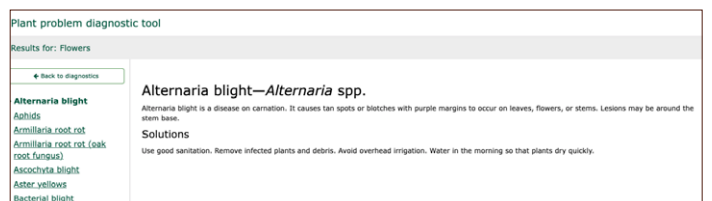
3. Your next choice is the part of the plant (leaves, flowers, roots, etc.) that is showing the damage. If multiple parts are damaged, you can choose all of them.



4. Finally, choose from the damage types displayed (leaves curled, fruit deformed, wilting, etc.).



5. View results to get a list of potential causes on the left side of the page. Click through the different options to see photographs and facts about the pest or disorder, and links to more information.



If your results don't seem quite right, start over!

—Belinda Messenger-Sikes,  
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# Invasive Pest Spotlight: Tree-of-heaven

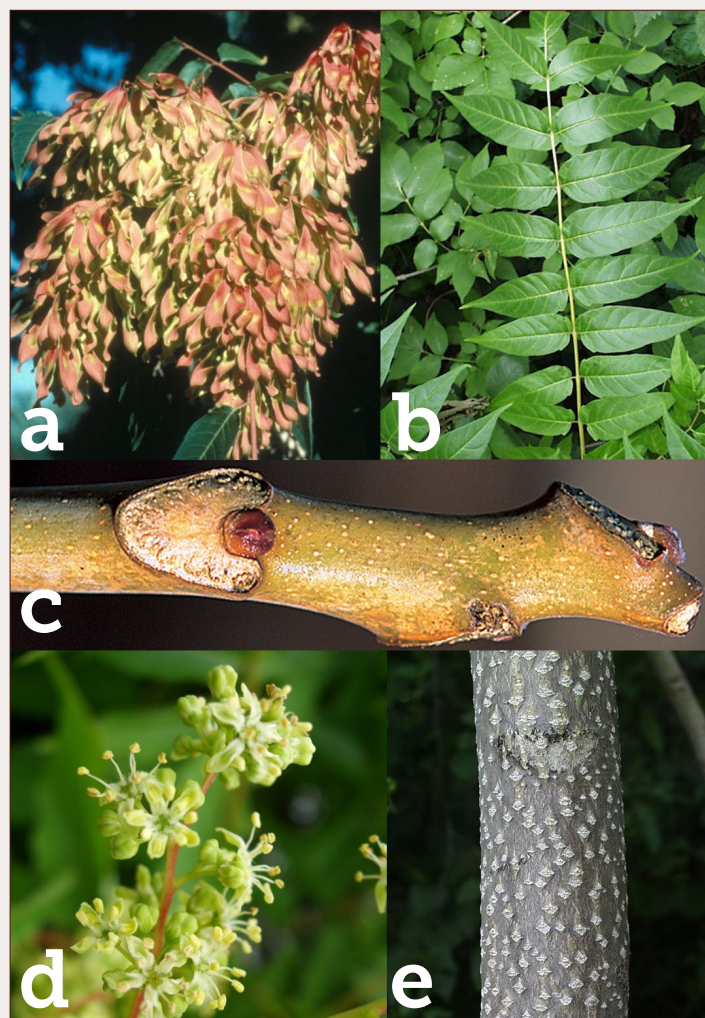
The invasive pest spotlight focuses on emerging or potential invasive pests in California. In this issue we are covering the tree-of-heaven.

## Tree-of-heaven facts

Tree-of-heaven, *Ailanthus altissima*, was originally from China and became a popular landscape shade tree in the 1800's. However, its rapid growth, aggressive spread, and native habitat disruption have made it a global problem. Reproducing rapidly through dense root suckers and wind dispersal of its "winged" seeds (samaras), tree-of-heaven has proven incredibly difficult to control. A mature tree can produce 325,000 seeds each year, and the extensive root system can cause major damage to sewers, sidewalks and foundations. These trees are drought resistant, tolerant of many soil conditions, and grow along roadsides, in alleyways, vacant lots, and urban parks. Tree-of-heaven can be identified by several distinctive traits. The bark is grey with diamond shaped fissures and a cantaloupelike texture. The leaflets have smooth edges with two glandular notches (teeth) at the base. The twigs have heart-shaped leaf scars with spongy brown center (pith). The seeds form in clusters of single seeded samaras that are 1-2 inches long and are green, yellow, red, or brown. Flowers are small, pale yellow-green, and grow in upright clusters. All plant parts smell like rancid peanut butter.

## What can you do?

Do not plant tree-of-heaven. It is included on the California State Noxious Weeds List as an invasive plant species to avoid. Tree-of-heaven attracts other invasive pests, including the brown marmorated stink bug and spotted lanternfly, which prefer tree-of-heaven as a host and can damage crops and ornamental plants. If you have this tree on your property, consult with an arborist about



Parts of the tree-of-heaven: a) samaras; b) leaves; c) twig; d) flowers; e) bark. All images from Bugwood.org.

removal. Simply cutting or pruning this tree can make the problem worse, as it triggers the growth of new suckers that can emerge up to 50 feet away, leading to rapid and uncontrollable spread. To learn more about tree-of-heaven visit [www.cal-ipc.org/plants/profile/ailanthus-altissima-profile/](http://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/profile/ailanthus-altissima-profile/).

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For more information about managing pests, contact your University of California Cooperative Extension office, or visit the UC IPM website at [ipm.ucanr.edu](http://ipm.ucanr.edu).

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