

Spring weeding

Weeds are often the first greens that appear in the landscape, especially after a wet winter.

The distinction between desirable and weed can be difficult.

A weed is a plant **you do not want in your landscape**. Do you see a seedling of something you grew last year or the year before? Do you **want** it in that space again? If not, pull it.

If a green rosette appears in turf, it is probably a weed. If you have desert landscaping with few plants, then a plant that has just appeared in the middle of the rock mulch is likely a weed.

As soon as you see seedlings of annual weeds, like prostrate spurge, Malta star thistle or crabgrass, get out the rake and hoe to pop them out while their root systems are small. After temperatures rise, removing all the roots will take considerably more work.

Controlling annual weeds is, in part, a timing issue. It is critical to get rid of them before flowering and seed production. After they have flowered, they are likely to have developed seeds. Next year's problem will be considerably worse.

Perennial weeds like tamarisk or



dandelion present another set of difficulties. Bigger plants have bigger **and more vigorous** root systems. Gardeners generally encourage healthy and dynamic root systems, but not when the plant is uninvited, crowding out desirable ones. Perennial seedlings are problematic, but adult may also be present. With adult weeds, pull or kill as much of the root system as possible. Some plants produce new shoots from roots as long as they are still viable.

For many gardeners, weeding is a necessary evil that begs to be put off. Do not procrastinate. The situation will only get worse.

Prevention is important. If you have not mulched your garden in the past, make this the year that you do. Whether straw, bark or gravel, put something on

the surface of the soil to conserve water, keep temperatures even and block light from weed seeds. There are many choices; find one that looks right in your landscape.

Further impede seed germination by put a layer of landscape cloth under rock mulch.

Many herbicides are available. Some products specifically target seedlings and germinating seeds. Some are effective on grasses, and others work almost exclusively on

broadleaf plants. Some kill all plants in an area that needs to be clear of foliage. In general, these should be the last resort, after prevention and hand weeding.

While they may say “weed killer”, these products generally cannot recognize the difference between desirable landscape plants and weeds. If an herbicide is your best bet for controlling a weed problem, make sure to choose the right product for the job. READ the label.

If you are not sure about identifying weeds, there are texts with terrific pictures and descriptions. One is *Weeds of the West*. It covers problem plants west of the Rockies. The other, *Weeds of California and other western states*, is expensive, but very detailed and includes a CD.

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