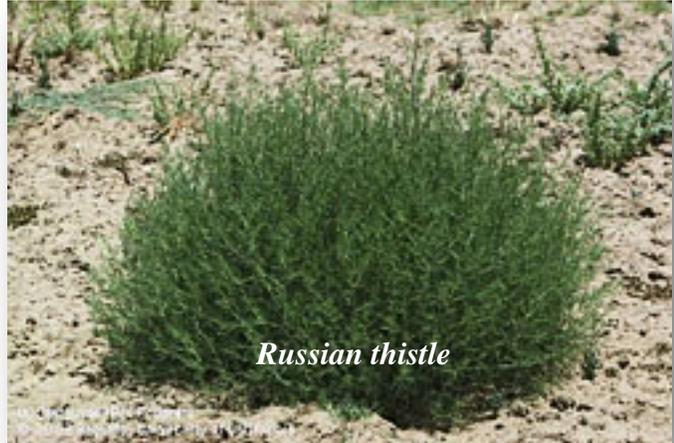




Weeds in spring-March

Am I the only person in southern Nevada whose home looks as if she has decided to create an all-weed garden? Yes, it was nice to have rain this past spring, makes since it makes our landscapes lush, but not all the plants are welcome.

My little yard is now festooned with sow thistle, and red brome grass, and with miscellaneous mustards and Mediterranean grass – among others, even Russian thistle. How many people think tumbleweed is an authentic symbol of the old west? No, most of the things we call tumbleweed are just tumbling across the landscape, spreading the seed of this invader – Russian thistle.



Some weeds seem to appear out of nowhere. I don't know whether they came on the wind or were dropped from a bird, but the weeds just keep coming. Aside from complaining, what's there to do?

Of course, complaining might be a good **start**, but not it's a great weed control technique.

Once the unwanted plants have made their appearance, it's time to take charge. Ignoring them will absolutely give them supremacy. There are two basic methods of weed control: the first is cultural – I don't mean singing opera to them –the other's chemical. When you see a weed, you might just pull it up immediately, and that is still the best, especially if you can get the whole plant out. Other cultural practices generally have the same goal. If you have small weeds, using a hoe is one of the easiest ways to deal with them. There are several kinds of hoes; the usual is a solid blade whose flat end is placed perpendicular to the handle. With these, you pull the blade toward you. It takes up a fair amount of soil as it pulls at the weeds. This is ok, but can be pretty tough on our tender backs. There are others you might want to try. I have several.

There's one called diamond hoe, named after the shape of the head, which you push, rather than pull. It's got sharp enough edges to cut through weed roots and upturn them pretty easily. It doesn't turn the soil, which means less strain on the intrepid gardener. My personal choice is a tool that has several names – hoop hoe, scuffle hoe, or hula hoe. I think that refers to your movement when you're using it. With this one, you can both push and pull, as you get the blade just under the soil and run through the weed roots. Very fast and effective. Finally, for tight spaces, like when the weeds start peeking out between the pads of your prickly pear cactus, there's something called a cobra, or a cobra head. It is like having a very strong finger to pull up weeds. You can find them with long or short handles. Now, I wish I'd bought the long handled one.

These will get rid of many, or most of the problem plants in the garden.

“Herbicides” are chemicals called that can do much of the same work, but be careful with them. They may be called “weed killers” but they are not that **smart**. They do not know the difference between the plant you want and the one you want to kill. Make sure to read the label – for instance, if it says “weed preventer” it will **not** affect established weeds, only tiny seedlings. If something is designed to kill Bermuda grass, it might just as easily kill other grasses as well.



When they are in your rock mulch, it is not much fun to pull weeds, so here is where herbicides can be a benefit. Some places sell what they call “horticultural vinegar”. It will burn down whatever’s above the soil, but not affect the roots. There’s a certain satisfaction in seeing the bad guys wither and die. This is **much stronger** than household vinegar, so use it like any other potentially dangerous chemical, with care.

Happy weeding!

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