How Do I Get Rid of Weeds in my Garden

Dale Odorizzi, Lanark County Master Gardeners (Article and photos)

Many first-time gardeners and a few long-term gardeners come to Master Gardeners with the lament—I just weeded my garden and now all the weeds are coming back. What can I do?

Weeding is a part of gardening—not our favorite part but an important part. There are some natural methods to reduce or eliminate weeds in your garden.

Mulch—An organic mulch, such as shredded leaves, straw or wood chips applied around your plants blocks weed seeds from sunlight, thus eliminating weed growth. Mulch also has the benefit of retain moisture, reducing the need to water your plants as often. Apply a layer of mulch at least 2.5 cm thick between plants and along the rows.



Arbor with garden mulched

For persistent weeds, exclude light by covering the soil with dampened newspaper or brown cardboard. Use at least 10 sheets of newspaper. Put 5 cm of straw or compost on top. This method works best when starting a new garden bed. Do not use landscape cloth. People are often told that this prevents weeds. It may keep weeds from growing through the cloth but weed seeds love to germinate on top and send roots through the cloth and become almost impossible to remove.



Hori-Hori Knife

Regularly pull the weeds out manually. Use a comfortable kneeling pad or knee pads. This activity brings you close to your plants so you can check on how they are growing. Cut the stems off at or below the soil. I was recently gifted a Hori-Hori knife that works very well for this.

One of our Master Gardeners always recommends planting a lot of plants, close together. This will reduce the area in which weeds can grow.



Liatris planted close so weeds don't grow

Every time you disturb the soil, you move weed seeds from underground to the top of the soil where they will happily germinate. The no-dig or no-till approach to gardening reduces the weed numbers. Weed gently and avoid disturbing the soil.

Finally, if you cannot do a thorough weeding job, at least dead head the weeds to keep them from going to seed. You can compost the leafy parts of the weeds, but most home composters do not raise the temperature in their compost bins high enough to prevent the weeds from going to seed.

Don't look at weeding as a chore. It can be a pleasant way to spend an afternoon. Enjoy the plants close up and butterflies and bees and birds that come to your beautiful garden. When I lived in the county, I had lots of gardens. Hubby used to say that if he was looking for me all he had to do was look to the sky and see the Turkey Vultures circling. I was a meal about to happen as it had been so long since I had moved very much.

So often we gardeners, look at our own garden, and only see the flaws. When we look at someone else's garden we see the beauty. Enjoy the beauty in your own garden.

Have a Wonderful Summer!

If you have a gardening question, contact us at lanarkmg@gmail.com. Visit us at the Perth and Almonte Farmers Markets.