

CONTROLLING ESTABLISHED WEEDS

Many weeds can be controlled simply by using a few hand tools.

HOEING: It's best to choose a dry day so that the cut weeds dry up and die quickly.

- Use a Dutch hoe to control annual weeds. This tool enables you to cut through weeds without damaging plant roots.
 - Use a draw hoe for chopping weeds in half.
 - Use an onion or hand hoe to weed among closely grown plants.
- HAND WEEDING:** When weeding, try to choose a time when the soil is moist but the weather is dry.
- Hold the weed close to the soil, and then pull it out with the roots intact. Shake off the soil.
 - Wear gloves and protect your knees with a knee pad.
 - Do not put any weeds that have set seed on the compost heap - they will create more trouble next year!

CHEMICAL WEEDKILLERS:

Anywhere you do not want anything at all to grow, chemical weedkillers are both useful and labour-saving. Weedkillers work by destroying or blocking the water passages in plant leaves, stems or roots, so preventing growth and eradicating the weeds. Chemicals are best combined with



other methods and should always be used with great care and strictly according to the instructions on the packaging. Keep them out of reach of children and animals, wear gloves and wash your hands after use.

- Apply in spring or summer for best results, avoiding windy days.
- Rain can ruin the effect of many weedkillers.
- Always identify the weed type before attempting to control it so the correct chemical is used.
- Weedkillers are available in several forms including gels, liquids and ready-to-use formulations.
- For borders, use a paint-on gel formulation, applied to weeds that are growing where hand weeding or spraying is difficult without damaging nearby plants.
- Use a liquid weedkiller on paths, patios and drives.

TIME-SAVING TIPS

- As you potter round the garden, pull up any weeds you spot.
- A dribble bar is an efficient, low-cost way to apply liquid weedkillers.
- If you are tackling an especially large weedy area, start by cutting off weeds' flowers and seeds.
- The best way to remove dandelions is with an old kitchen knife. Keep the blade vertical and cut downwards in a circle around the weed. Lever the knife back and forth. Pull out the weed with its root intact.
- Never let a weed see Sunday!



WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Hoes - onion, Dutch, draw
- Patio weeder
- Daisy grubber
- Dribble bar
- Kitchen knife
- Black polythene
- Chipped bark
- Gravel

Chemical weedkillers:

- systemic weedkillers travel through plants' sap and kill roots.
- residual weedkillers prevent weed growth for long periods

• contact weedkillers kill all plants they touch

For more information:
www.rhs.org.uk/advice
www.plantforlife.info

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THE EASY GUIDE TO

WEED CONTROL



Photography: Tim Sandall/*The Garden*, Terry Rugg

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WHERE DO I START?

You don't need weeds in your garden for the very good reason that they require the same nutrients (food provided by soil), light and water as other plants and so compete for them. By getting rid of weeds you are feeding the plants you love. But before you can do anything, you must first know your enemy, then decide upon the best course of attack.

TYPES OF WEED

WHAT IS A WEED? Quite simply, it's a plant in the wrong place. There are four types of weed - annual, biennial, perennial and woody. They grow in most soils and situations and need different methods of removal:

• **Annual weeds:** Although annual weeds, as their name suggests, die within the year, they reproduce through seeds, re-creating thousands of them - and these seeds can survive dry and cold periods, not to mention travelling great distances. As the old saying goes, 'One year's seeding is seven years' weeding', which is why it's a good idea to get rid of them before they set seed. Some of our most common weeds include: annual meadow grass, wavy and hairy bitter cress, fat hen, goosegrass, poppies, chickweed, speedwells and groundsel. These are best removed by hoeing or hand weeding.

• **Biennial weeds:** Like annuals, these normally reproduce through seed but during the first year the plant grows and accumulates food reserves, then flowers and sets seed the second year. Examples include evening primrose, ragwort, hemlock, hogweed and spear thistle.

• **Perennial weeds:** These weeds survive for more than two growing seasons and, in some cases, many years. If they are not removed, they can develop into woody plants. The deep and penetrating roots of these weeds make them a real challenge, however, and they can re-grow from the smallest segment so it's vital to remove the whole plant. Common perennials include: nettle, ground elder, creeping thistle, dandelion, couchgrass and bindweed. These are best removed by hand or carefully applied chemical weedkillers.

• **Woody weeds:** In order to destroy these weeds, they must be dug up or sprayed with a chemical weed killer. The most commonly found plants from this group include ivy, holly, elder and bramble. If left to grow too big, these become more difficult to remove.



PREVENTING GROWTH

Once weeds have become established, they are far more difficult to deal with. Deprive them of light to suppress their growth and prevent them taking over your garden. Here are a few quick and easy methods:

- Gravel - a 5cm layer of coarse gravel around ornamental plants will suppress weeds (right).
- Chipped bark - a 5cm layer of bark over beds and borders suppresses weeds, gives a decorative finish and helps insulate plants against frost.
- Polythene or membrane - on uncultivated ground, cover soil with old carpet or black polythene. If you want to cultivate susceptible areas, cover the soil with a landscape membrane (far right) with planting holes.



GROUND COVER PLANTS

Covering areas of soil with a green carpet of foliage that is not only attractive but can also suppress weed growth has many advantages in the garden.

UNDER TREES AND SHRUBS:

Underplanting shrubs and trees with ground cover can improve the overall effect of the garden.

The range of plants available for the purpose is extensive and most groups of plants can be considered. However, researching the ultimate height of the chosen plants is important as many may grow higher than a ground-hugging carpet and others can spread over larger areas and become invasive.

Some plants such as roses may resent an underplanting of ground cover plants around their bases, competing for food.

Whichever you choose, the best results are achieved by planting a single type. Ask your garden centre or nursery about the number that will be required to cover a specific area - this will save financial outlay and ensure that the area is covered in the fastest time possible.

As with all planting within the garden, good soil preparation is

imperative and it is worth digging the soil thoroughly to a depth of 25cm minimum before planting and adding good amounts of organic material such as garden compost, well-rotted farmyard manure, mushroom compost or a proprietary planting mixture.

COVERING BANKS: The covering and retaining of banks is one role that ground cover plants achieve very well, often self-rooting as they grow, so consolidating the soil and preventing erosion.

On banks it may be necessary to dig planting holes at regular intervals at spacings suitable for the plant chosen.

FEEDING: Applying a general fertiliser to the soil in spring will help sustain growth and build up good root clumps, which in turn will give more foliage and flower performance and speed up the spread and coverage of the plants.

WATERING: It is very important to keep ground-cover plants well watered, particularly when planted on banks, and when used as an underplanting. Pay special attention in dry weather in spring and early summer.



The following are good examples of true ground cover:

- a = alpine
- s = shrubs
- p = perennial
- Acaena* a (New Zealand burr)
- Ajuga* p (bugle)
- Anaphalis* p (snowy-everlasting)
- Cerastium* a (snow in summer)
- Cotoneaster* low-growing evergreen s
- Epimedium* p (barrenwort or bishop's hat)
- Euphorbia* low-growing varieties p (cushion spurge)
- Fragaria x ananassa* 'Variegata' p (variegated strawberry)
- geraniums (perennial types) p
- Hypericum calycinum* s (rose of Sharon)

- Lamium galeobdolon* p (yellow-flowered dead nettle)
- Lamium maculatum* (pictured above left) p (spotted dead nettle)
- Lonicera pileata* s (privet honeysuckle)
- Lysimachia* p (creeping Jenny)
- Nepeta* p (catmint or catnip)
- Pulmonaria* p (lungwort) (pictured above right)
- roses - ground cover varieties s
- Rubus tricolor* s (creeping thornless bramble)
- Saxifraga umbrosa* a (London pride)
- Tellima grandiflora* p (fringe cups)
- Thymus* a (thyme)
- Vinca* s (periwinkle)
- spreading conifers - eg *Juniperus rigida* subsp. *conferta*