



Trowel Talk!

June, 2013

The weed gremlins

Gremlins always drop by my garden in June with armloads of weeds. They come during the night, usually after a good rain.

When I first read published weed lists I was surprised to find plants such as goldenrod, mullein, and yarrow there. I now know that plants get listed as weeds for more than one reason. The reasons are sometimes economic or health related although, in our home gardens, they are most often aesthetic.

To me, a weed is any plant that was not invited to grow in my garden or lawn but that took up residence there anyway. Usually, it is taking up the space of some other plant that I prefer.

The question is - how do you send weeds packing?

Over the years I have found that the first step to controlling weeds is to identify them and find out how they propagate - from seed or from the roots. To help you do this, the federal government has an excellent web-site:

WeedInfo.ca.

Most garden weeds release large amounts of seed during the growing season. The seeds overwinter in the soil and sprout the next spring. They often do not originate in your garden. Instead they are brought in by birds or by the wind.

Some weeds such as black medic, purslane and common ragweed are annuals. To control these, you must prevent them from going to seed. You can cut off the growing stems at ground level or pull them out entirely before they flower and add them to the compost pile or leave them to dry on top of the soil.



Medicago lupulina (black medic)

Some weeds such as common mallow and mullein only produce flowers in their second year of growth (biennials). Controlling these involves two steps: cut off any flowers before they go to seed and uproot entirely any first-year plants so that they will not come back in their second year.



Verbascum thapsus (common mullein)

Other weeds propagate from seed and have roots that easily survive our Ottawa valley winters and green-up year after year. Two of these hardy perennials are the well-known dandelion and broad-leaved plantain. To control weeds in this group, the roots must be destroyed or removed entirely.



Taraxacum (dandelion)

The average dandelion seed head has 180 seeds and of course each plant produces multiple flowers.

The final group spreads not only from seed but also vegetatively by above or below ground creeping stems. Ox-eye daisy, quack grass and yarrow are but a few in this group. A new plant can start from even small pieces of root or stem which makes these plants especially difficult to control. Every bit of root and stem must be removed.

Although June is the month to pamper and nourish your plants, try to make some time to get to know your uninvited guests, the weeds. Your knowledge will lead to better weed control and more time to enjoy the plants you want in your garden. I have been trying to outsmart the gremlins for many years and you, as I, will take a more philosophical view of weeding when you accept that they will continue to be brought into your garden by birds and the wind. And who can stop the wind?

Trowel Talk!

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June TO DO List

- Perennials can be moved if the weather is not too hot and sunny AND if you are willing to water them regularly if there is no rain. The best time to divide and transplant is when the forecast is for overcast weather and/or rain.
- Stay ahead of the weeds by spending a bit of time every day. A daily 'inspection' of your yard with a hoe in hand to take out annual weeds will make the chore more manageable.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month:

To complement our feature article, we offer some weed control tips:

- Applying a 2.5 to 5 cm layer of mulch around perennials, shrubs & trees will help stop weed from growing
- The regular application of corn gluten meal (CGM) helps control weeds as it suppresses seed germination. It comes in a granular form and can be sprinkled on garden beds and lawns. The one caveat is that it stops all seeds from germinating so it should not be used where you want annuals to self-seed or if you are trying to grow plants from seeds. Even grass seed is prevented from germinating by CGM. Existing perennial weeds will still have to be removed manually.
- Boiling water can be poured onto weeds growing in the cracks between patio stones or interlock. Make sure you pour an adequate amount on weeds with long tap roots as the hot water must 'burn' the tap root to kill it completely.
- Horticultural vinegar (or strong white vinegar) can be used as a weed killer.
- A propane torch/weed killer also works well to eradicate weeds from patio areas and gravel driveways. (Caution: do not use near wood mulch and make sure all patio furniture is out of the way first.)

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton



Where to find us this month for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

Telephone Help Line: 613-236-0034

- Wednesday and Thursday 1-3 pm (all year)

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca

- monitored daily
- send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID

CLINICS:

Byward Market: Saturdays, May through June (9 am – 5 pm)

Parkdale Market: Saturdays, May through June (9 am – 1 pm)

Carp Market: Saturdays, May through June (9 am – 1 pm)

Ottawa Farmers Market (Brewers Park): Sundays, July through September (9 am – 1 pm)

Main Street Farmer's Market: July 13 & 27, August 10 & 24 (10 am – 2 pm)

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Rose Workshop – June 15 – 1-3 pm

Edythe Falconer, Master Gardener

Heritage Rose Gardens, Central Experimental Farm,

Hosted by the Friends of the Farm

(<http://www.friendsofthefarm.ca/events.htm>)

Culinary Herbs in the Garden and on the Table: How to grow, store and use herbs in recipes – June 19 – 7:00 pm

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener & Richard Guenette, Foodie

Meeting Room A, in the Greenboro Community Centre (co-housed with Greenboro District Library), 363 Lorry Greenberg Drive

Hosted by the Greater Ottawa Water Garden and Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Little Roses for Small Gardens – June 18 – 7:30 pm

Edythe Falconer, Master Gardener

Stittsville United Church, 6255 Fernbank Road, Stittsville

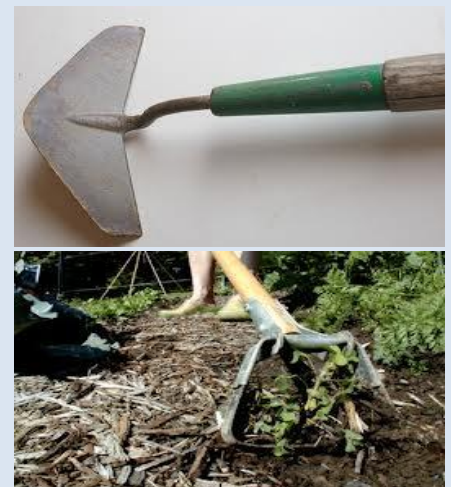
Hosted by the Stittsville Goulbourn Horticultural Society (guests welcome)



For information on arranging a lecture for your group: speakers@mgottawa.mgoi.ca

For more information on Master Gardeners, visit us at: <http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>

- Many annual weeds can be kept under control by a weekly shallow hoeing. A sharp hoe will cut the weed roots and loosen the top 2.5 cm of the soil so that the roots don't have good contact with the soil. This is most effective when done in the early morning on a hot sunny day so that the weeds and the weed roots dry out and die. If the soil is compacted it may be harder to break through the soil the first time, but once the soil is loosened, subsequent cultivating should be easier. Don't hoe too deep – you will just churn up more weed seeds.



A standard hoe (top) or a 'stirrup' hoe (bottom) do a great job of uprooting weeds.