

6/14/2022

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## Keeping up with the Weeds

The rain over the last few weeks has been welcome after the dry fall and winter we had however all that water has kept me out of the garden and the weeds are taking advantage. It's an unfortunate fact that all of our in-ground gardens have a weed seed bank in the soil and once you get behind weeding the garden, it can seem almost impossible to catch up. While the long-range forecast is calling for a dryer pattern to set up later in June, here are some tips to help stay ahead of the weeding during the summer.



- *Weeds vs. Crops*- One of the best steps to keep your garden weed free is to provide an environment that favors the vegetables over the weeds. Plant your vegetables at the ideal times, fertilize the vegetables as needed so they grow vigorously and outcompete weeds, use drip irrigation or soaker hoses to only water the vegetables and don't water between rows where weeds will sprout.
- *Cover the soil*- The less soil surface that sees the sun, the fewer weeds you will have. There are several options available to cover your soil from grass clippings (make sure you haven't applied weed killer) to cardboard boxes flattened to weed mat, it all depends on your preference and how much you want to spend. My plan this summer is to use cardboard boxes as the base then cover the cardboard with lawn clippings, leaves and other composted materials to form a layer 4-5" thick to keep the soil constantly covered. Even if you don't cover the soil around the plants, try to cover the pathways and open spaces between the rows.
- *Use cover crops*- Cover crops are an excellent way to suppress weeds between plants, reduce compaction and add nutrients to the soil. You can plant cover crops in the spring to suppress summer weeds or in the fall after the garden has come out to keep winter weeds from growing. Some common cover crops include winter wheat, annual rye grass, clovers, vetches, peas, soybeans, and buckwheat. I also liked to mix in radishes or a root crop to help break up compacted soil.
- *Use mechanical means*- If possible it's best to hoe, pull or control weeds when they are small but they aren't the only mechanical method of controlling weeds. If you are feeling brave using a flame weeder is an option (although I would avoid it if the weather turns dry) to control a variety of weeds. One of my friends is trying a solar powered weeding robot for her commercial vegetable garden. So far, she has had great success with her robot keeping up with the weeds and considers it a good investment although it has a limited range of area it can cover.
- *Chemical*- For some weeds, chemicals maybe the best method of keeping them under control but they should be used with caution. Glyphosphate products can be used in the garden, just make sure to use regular glyphosphate and not one of the options that has a residual. Another option is to use Preen or a similar product that prevents the weed seeds from germinating. If you plant to plant a fall garden, be sure any pre-emergant herbicide will have worn off before you plant your fall seeds. With any chemical application, be sure to read the label thoroughly and apply all products according to the label for your safety and the best growth of the garden.

Weeds will unfortunately always be a part of the gardening process. Your best bet is to use several methods to control the weeds in combination to achieve the best overall control. Do your best to prevent the weeds in your garden from flowering and going to seed which will make the problem worse in the coming years. In my experience the best way to prevent weeds is to cover the ground with something to keep the weeds from germinating. You can eventually win the war but there will be several battles along the way.