



Consistent effort required to control garden weeds

by Don Kitchen
University of Guelph

Many areas around the home landscape present a unique weed control challenge to the homeowner. These include deciduous and evergreen shrubs in foundation plantings. These areas may be interplanted with annual flowers and perennial ground covers. Herbaceous perennial beds can also provide a battleground.

It is easy to recommend that you eliminate weeds, especially perennials, before establishing these plant areas. This is fine if we are just starting out, but most of us already have foundation plantings or perennial areas.

To control weeds in these areas we need a combination approach. First, adopt good cultural and management practices. Consistent light cultivation controls most annual weeds such as pigweed or purslane. A hoe or a hand cultivator are useful tools. It is not necessary to hoe deeply, you just have to cut these plants off just below ground level.

Cultivation is also useful in the control of perennial weeds such as quackgrass (twichgrass). In this case, remove the top growth, let the plant grow and remove top growth again. This way, you deplete the food reserve in the roots and the plant dies. Consistency is the key. Since this plant often gives us trouble close to shrubs, some hand pulling may be required.

Using mulches in permanent plantings also helps control weeds. A five to seven centimetre layer of wood chip mulch not only helps conserve soil moisture but also prevents the germination of many weed seeds.

Herbicides can be used to help control weeds in permanent planting areas but these should be used in conjunction with good cultural practices not as the only method of weed control. In shrub borders where perennial weeds such as quackgrass (twichgrass) are a problem, a material containing paraquat and diquat (Weedite or Weedol) can be used. This herbicide is called a "chemical mower". It kills the tops of the grass but not the roots. Two or three treatments a year usually cures the problem. It must be applied as a directed spray to the weed foliage taking care to avoid leaves or green bark of shrubs or trees. Also take care to avoid turf grass and flowers.

In planting areas where annual flowers or herbaceous perennials are mixed with shrubs and trees there are herbicides available to control many annual weeds. There is a great range in susceptibility of plants grown. Many garden flowers are as susceptible to the herbicide as the weeds you are trying to control. Read label directions completely and do not use on or around plants that are not listed on that label.

Products containing trifluralin can be used to control many annual grasses and broad-leaved weeds. This material is applied to weed emergence and must be incorporated by raking or irrigation. Consult the label for rates and plants around which it can be used.

A second product containing chloramben is available as a granular formulation. On small areas it can be applied using a jar with a perforated lid. This method is simple and effective. Apply around established plants when the foliage is dry and before weed emergence. Consult the label for plant species and rates.

EPTC is another herbicide available in granular formulations. This can be used around many transplanted annuals and perennials in shrub borders or foundation plantings. Apply this herbicide after transplants are established and incorporate into the soil with a rake or irrigation.

For further information, consult Ontario Ministry of Agriculture & Food Publication 529, Weed Control in Lawns and Gardens, available from the Information Branch, Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Legislative Buildings, Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A5 and local agricultural offices.

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