

# Keeping ahead of those weeds

If you grow anything chances are you have weeds. They abound in flower and vegetable gardens. Most of my summer, for example, was spent pulling, chopping and hoeing pesky weeds. I left for one week and when I returned, my vegetable garden was gone. Well, actually, it was there but was hidden under a hearty, towering crop of weeds. After that I couldn't keep up with their speedy growth. As I watched them die in the frosty fall weather, I wondered how I would fare next season. I am going to try some of these tips to keep my garden weed-free.

Mulching is a magnificent way to keep the weed population down. Mulch prevents light from reaching the weeds and also holds in the moisture. There are a couple of techniques and mediums available for your use. Wood chip mulch can usually be found in nurseries and garden centers. It is relatively inexpensive and available in 10-pound bags. Read the directions on the bag to determine how much of an area the bag will cover. Wood chips may be poured directly onto the soil. Leaves, grass clippings and straw can also be used as mulch but you should put a barrier, such as black material or newspaper, between the mulch and the ground.

Try this technique to stop weeds before they even begin. Start your tilling early. After you have tilled your ground in preparation for planting wait a couple of weeks. The weed seeds that have been brought to the top will begin to germinate and grow. When that happens, chop up the weeds by shallow retilling or hoeing. This should clear the way for your planting.

You can also rid your planting area of

weeds and some soil-borne diseases by solarizing your soil. Heat is a common disinfectant and you can use the sun's natural heat to improve your garden area. Till your planting areas about six weeks before you intend to put in your plants. Remove all the vegetation then water the ground until it is saturated. Wait about 24 hours and, at the end of that time, cover the ground with 3-6 mil plastic sheeting. Bury the edges of the sheeting and then let it sit for 4-6 weeks. If any weeds appear after you have removed the plastic, gently pull them so as not to disturb the surrounding soil. Wait a few more days to let the ground cool and then, finally, you may begin to plant.

Another way to eliminate your weeds is by pouring rock salt into the crevices. Be careful though, as salt will kill the weeds along with the vegetables or flowers. Another tricky, but proven, solution is boiling water. Put the boiling water in a teapot so that you have a spout to keep the stream of water more controlled.

To cover all your bases, try some winter groundcover, grown in areas that suffer from heavy weed infestation. A thick mass of plants will, obviously, block the sunlight, therefore eliminating the weeds.

The most common and perhaps unpopular way to get rid of weeds is to simply pull them out. It is not the easiest way, but it is perhaps the cheapest. And if you water the weeds, you'll make the task even easier. You should first let the water soak in. Then when you pull the weed, you will pull up the entire root and will not bother any of the surrounding roots.

—By Kathy Scott, special

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