

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 05-08-02) , ©2005

It's the time of year when weeds and their control or eradication is on many gardeners' minds. Weeds are really only a plant that is out of place. One gardener's weed is another gardener's plant treasure.

Weedy plants become problems when they prevent other plants from thriving, become invasive, destroy native plant habitat, are poisonous or become hazards. You can get Washington State's 2002 Noxious Weeds List by calling the WSU Kitsap County Extension Office at 360-337-7157 or write in care of this newspaper and I'll mail you a copy of the list.

Beware of the products you'll see advertised on TV and available at home garden centers and nurseries. The number one rule to remember when using herbicides is if the herbicide can kill weeds it will kill other plants too. Use with extreme caution. Always, always read every single teensy tiny word printed on the label before you purchase the product. Remember that the TV ads were produced to entice you to purchase the product and often what the spin-doctors are spinning usually has only a small grain of truth if at all. Read the label and become informed consumers.

We've all either used or been tempted to use Glyphosate, Caseron and Weed and Feed type products. Weed and Feed type products often encourage weed production in your lawn. Instead try Corn Gluten and practice mowing and removal of weeds. Apply Corn Gluten with a fertilizer spreader or you can purchase it in powder form, mix with water and spray it on. Corn Gluten also works as a ten percent nitrogen fertilizer. Corn Gluten works in landscape plantings too. Weeds won't disappear instantly but in several months or in a year or two you'll have very few weeds and your plants will be thriving from the nitrogen in the Corn Gluten.

Caseron (dichlobenil) is a pre-emergent preventing growth of every plant in the area of application, not only the weeds, but your desirable plants as well. Pre-emergents also prevent underground bulbs from growing and desirable seeds you've planted won't germinate either. Glyphosate (Round-up) type products can build up in the soil and damage or kill trees and other woody plants. Use these products with great caution and realize they can pollute water if washed off landscapes. Notice especially the "Hazards" and "Caution" warnings on the labels.

You may have heard the phrase "permaculture." Some gardeners use this term to describe the process of using the "least-disturbance" method of gardening. With the permaculture method a mat of grasses or weeds is kept mowed or trimmed to prevent weed seeds from forming. This method works best in vegetable gardens and annual flower gardens. I'm going to try it in my rockery and in a neglected area where weedy grasses have taken over. I'm going to keep the grass mat mown down and place some huge pots of plants in the area.

Find the books “Weedless Gardening” by Lee Reich (Workman Publishing \$8.95) and “Gaia’s Garden” by Toby Hemenway (Chelsea Green Publishing \$24.95) at your favorite bookstore or check them out at the library to explore permaculture methods further.

English Ivy (*Helix Hedera*) is the big noxious weed now. The best thing we as gardeners can do is not purchase any more ivy. I know it’s tempting but if we want to be stewards of our earth we should examine whether or not we want it in our gardens. Keep it as a houseplant if you just have to have it.

If ivy is the only thing holding your bank together and you are unable to remove or replace it you might want to use your weed whacker to control the production of seeds and also to form a pruned boundary around the area so the ivy doesn’t spread any further.

I’ll cover the topic of ivy and blackberries in next week’s column. In the meantime don’t rush out to purchase Glyphosate (Round-up) type products to eradicate your ivy – it doesn’t work, contrary to popular belief.

Happy Mother’s Day Sunday to all you moms and especially to my adopted moms Mary Aitchison (of Suquamish) and Jenny B. Good (of Poulsbo). In honor of our mom Jean Stark who passed away this month my sisters and I are going to plant some hardy disease free rose bushes in her honor. Her favorite flower was the rose.