

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 09-10-03 What's Up) , ©2005

Weeds can be obnoxious, noxious and sometimes both. Many months ago I told you I'd report back on my experiment to outwit the weedy grasses colonizing part of my rockery. Read on for the report of my semi-failure and much more on the topic of those plants we not-so-fondly refer to as weeds.

The weedy grass hasn't spread any farther. It grew really long and when dry became quite easy to whack down and remove. Some of it, sadly, went to seed but the rest of the garden is densely planted so the sprouting grasslets become shaded out and die. Seedlings are easy to rip up out of the ground by their sneaky little stems.

I'll soon dig as much of the rhizomes as I can, will put layers of newspaper down, pile up some good composted garden soil and plant several Spanish lavender. The lavender grows quite profusely in my garden and will fill in the spot nicely. The grass will eventually either blend in so I won't see it any more or will go away. The rest of the rockery is full of Flower Carpet Roses, Rosemary, Cistus, Heather and Hebe, all plants that fill in and out-compete the weeds.

September and October are ideal months to get out into the garden and pull up, chop down or dig up all those pesky weeds. The more you remove weeds from your paths and gardens the fewer weeds you'll have over time. A weed whacker works well in areas where it won't destroy any beloved plants. Weeding torches on paths and driveways satisfy some gardeners. The real trick is to more or less "melt" the weeds, not singe or burn them to a crisp. A little bit of heat goes a long way. This torching method has to be repeated on a regular basis. I find cutting, trimming and removing the weeds manually works more efficiently and effectively. But, you can decide which method works best for you.

About a year ago I found a great tool called the "Weed Popper" for under twenty-five dollars at a local store. The Weed Popper is very sturdy and has stood up to many weed battles without even a whimper. It's easy on one's back too. You use your foot to push the popper tines into the soil near the weed, step on the lever, push up and the weed pops out of the ground. Very satisfying. It especially works well on dandelions and younger buttercup.

Speaking of dandelions someone mentioned they'd heard you could unscrew them. It actually works! I kid you not. It especially works when the ground is sufficiently moist. Grab the clump of leaves as close to the base of the root as you can get your fingers. Pull up carefully, turning the plant to the left or right, unscrewing it from the ground. Go out and experiment with this method, you'll be surprised. It works about sixty percent of the time. The rest of the time you'll have to use a hand spade or one of those screwdriver looking tools to remove the roots.

Well, weedy grasses and dandelions are obnoxious but of greater concern to us are the “Noxious Weeds.” These are weeds deemed by the USDA and the State to be a hazard to humans, livestock, agriculture, livelihood or the environment. They’re also termed noxious if they become a threat to our native plants. Noxious Weeds are categorized as A, B and C Weeds. Citizens are required by law to do something about the A and B Weeds. To obtain a current listing of the Washington State Noxious Weed List for 2003 contact Arno Bergstrom, Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Agent for Kitsap County at 337-7157. You can also obtain the list by visiting www.wa.gov/agr/weedboard or http://www.nwcb.wa.gov/weed_info. The Extension Office Noxious Weed Advisors, a dedicated group of trained volunteers, are available to visit groups to provide education on how to identify noxious weeds and control or eradicate them.

One noxious weed that’s been offered for sale at a local business in Port Gamble is called Policeman’s Helmet (CORRECT SPELLING) (*Impatiens glandulifera*). This profusely reseeding annual grows three to ten feet tall and has red stems with pale pink flowers. The seeds when touched spit twenty feet. Each blossom contains a minimum of 800 seeds. *Impatiens glandulifera* has been declared one of the top twenty plants for removal and eradication in England where it is destroying and overcoming the native plants. *Impatiens glandulifera* can invade moist areas and has the potential to become as invasive as Loosestrife in our waterways. Think several times before accepting this plant as a gift from a friend or buying it from the purveyor in Port Gamble.

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