KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good at It

“Annual Weeds”

April 16, 2019

This week and next we’re going to talk about weeds – you know, those pesky plants that thrive where you don’t want them to. The derogatory term “weed” is really somewhat subjective, because what’s considered a weed here might not be so elsewhere. Did you know, for instance, that European immigrants purposefully brought dandelion seeds with them to cultivate what they considered a treasured crop?

That said, as we’ve discovered with those prized dandelions, plants that are tame in their native landscape can become bold and pushy when moved to new locations. A weed, then, is a plant that locally or regionally is a hazard to people, animals or desired crops or native plants – or which is simply a nuisance, detracting from the aesthetic qualities of a landscape.

The first step in controlling a weed is to identify the plant. You want to know its ***lifespan:*** is it anannual, a perennial or a biennial? You want to know its ***season of active growth***: is it a cool or warm season plant? And finally, you want to know its ***classification*** -- is it a broadleaf, a grass or a sedge? This information determines the best time and way to control it.

Let’s focus this week on annual weeds, those whose lifespan is a year or less.

In general, annual weeds grow from seeds from the previous growing season.

The plants might self-seed or they might be brought into the garden by birds, wind, or on the coats or clothes of two- or four-legged animals. Yes, *even you* can introduce weeds into your own garden!

Annual weeds go from seed to seed in less than a year and often in periods as short as 45 days -- so you have to on your toes! Some thrive in sun, others in shade provided by neighboring plants in your garden beds. Fortunately, annual weeds are generally shallow rooted and -- if you get to them early enough – they can be easily hand pulled or cut off with a hoe. Because they are annuals, you can kill them even if you don’t get all of the roots out. You just need to get to them *before* they mature and go to seed.

***Winter*** or ***cool season annual weeds*** germinate in late fall and through early spring and go to seed in spring or early summer. Some common examples of **broadleaf** winter annuals are *jagged chickweed* and *bur buttercup*, both among the first weeds to germinate and flower. Another is *hairy bittercress*, whose seeds explode from their casings with wild abandon. **Grassy** winter annuals include *cheatgrass*, which wreaks havoc in rural fields and in pets’ ears and eyes, while *annual bluegrass* readily populates bare spots in our lawns and groundcovers.

***Summer annuals*** get started in the spring and summer and go to seed in the summer and fall. Many of our most annoying weeds are in this group, including crabgrass, pigweed, purslane, lambsquarter and the infamous puncturevine, which is an increasingly problematic noxious weed in Central Oregon.

There are several preventive tactics you can follow to minimize the success of annual weeds. First, make an effort to buy weed-free top soil and nursery plants. Plant ornamentals closely together to shade weeds and, when possible, use a drip irrigation system to deprive weeds of essential moisture. In your vegetable garden, interplant short-duration vegetables between crops of longer duration. Use mulch in your beds to hamper weed growth and emergence and, finally, avoid disposing of weed seedlings or seeds in an unmanaged compost pile.

For more information on this or any other gardening topic, call the Master Gardeners at 541-548-6088 or go to our website [www.gocomga.com](http://www.gocomga.com) and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good at It on KPOV, The Point.

**Resources**

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