

Down the Garden Path

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THE GRAPE VINE

Top Ten Yard and Garden Weeds

B. Rosie Lerner, Extension Consumer Horticulture Specialist

As I think about the uninvited plant guests in my yard and garden, I find it difficult to come up with a top ten list, or shall I say to stop at just 10 species of weeds! The first 5 or 6 come really quick, and then it seems like there are about 20 more that are contenders. But alas, I have pared down my list to the following persistent.

Number 10: Knotweed

This diminutive plant packs a lot of trouble for such little guy. Although it is an annual, it spreads prolifically by seed and comes up in really tough places where little else will grow such as cracks in sidewalks, driveways, and compacted soil. Prostrate knotweed forms mats of wiry stems and tiny leaves that can extend up to a couple of feet in diameter.



Number 9: Purslane

Another annual that spreads like wildfire through its seed, purslane is actually eaten as a vegetable in some cultures. It too grows like a mat with thick fleshy leaves and stems. Purslane has the ability to withstand long periods of drought and even if you cut it up with your hoe blade, each piece that remains in the garden seems to magically regrow a new root system if its allowed to remain in contact with the soil. This one is particularly troublesome in flower and vegetable gardens.



Number 8: Dandelion

Just about everyone has experienced the woes of dandelions. They are actually kind of pretty with their yellow, daisy-like blooms. But the blooms soon give way to a ball of white, fluffy seeds to provide for many more dandelions throughout the neighborhood. In fact, it is estimated that a single dandelion plant can produce 15,000 seeds in one growing season! And if that weren't enough, the perennial taproot of this plant grows deep in to the soil to allow each plant to live indefinitely while your mower just rides over the top of its rosette of leaves.



-- continued on next page --

Number 7: Bindweed



Related to the morning glory, bindweed is a perennial that spreads by both seeds and roots that can grow up to 30 feet! The smooth, slender stems spread over the ground until they encounter some unsuspecting landscape plant upon which it twines to the point of near strangulation!

Number 6: Yellow Nutsedge

Thought it appears to be grass-like, this yellowish green plant is a member of the sedge family, distinguished by a triangular shaped stem. Yellow nutsedge is particularly troublesome due to its ability to spread by both seed and by small tubers that persist in the soil. Although the plants are relatively easy to pull out of the ground, each little tuber that remains behind grow back several more plants.



Number 5: Bull Thistle

Now, some of you may never have seen this foe, but take it from me, its not one you want to wrestle with! Bull thistle is heavily armed and dangerous, with sharp spines along the leaves, stems and flower heads. This biennial weed grows a flat rosette of foliage during its first year, followed by a 2-4 foot tall flowering stem the second year. Bull thistle primarily is a pest in areas of undisturbed soil such as a pasture or struggling lawn.



Number 4: Creeping Charlie

Also known as ground ivy, this spreading perennial is a nuisance of gardens and lawns, especially in areas that are shady or with well-tended soil. A member of the mint family, creeping Charlie has square stems with opposite leaves, a bluish flower, and a rather strong aroma of bad mint. The nearly round leaves have large, rounded teeth, giving the leaves a scalloped appearance.



Number 3: Bitter Nightshade

Another twining, spreading perennial whose stems are somewhat woody. The stems will take root when in contact with the soil, and it also spreads by seed produced in little red berries. Bitter nightshade is poisonous in addition to being a pest.



Number 2: Canada Thistle

Another spreading perennial armed with spines along the leaves and stem. Although the blue-lavender flowers are quite pretty, they soon give way to fluffy, hairy seeds that spread in the wind to start new thistles. The creeping root system also gives rise to many new plants so that soon, your garden and yard become carpeted with thistle.



Number 1: Poison Ivy

I can hardly think of a more admirable foe than this versatile pest that spreads by seed, roots, and stems. Actually, poison ivy can be quite attractive as a ground cover or vine, sometimes even a shrub. Though the greenish flowers aren't much to look it, poison ivy does produce clusters of white berries that are strikingly contrasted by brilliant red fall color. But many people are sensitive to the oil contained in all parts of this plant.

I'm sure you can come up with more weed pests to add to this list, but all of my top ten are characterized by a resistance to most available control strategies, including hand-pulling, hoeing, mulching, chemicals, etc. They may get knocked back a bit, but they always seem to come back fighting.



Poison Ivy

For more information on controlling weeds around your property, please refer to Purdue's Extension Publications *HO-217, Weed Control for the Garden & Landscape* and *HO-218, Poison Ivy*. These publications and many others are also available on-line at <http://www.hort.purdue.edu/ext/garden_pubs.html>. ☺

OVER THE BACK FENCE

Q: There is a very large pine tree near our house. The owners of the tree have covered the roots with a substantial layer of black earth and planted plants on it, to make it look better, but can this cause any problems for the tree?

A: Yes, adding soil to the top of existing roots is a problem. It often injures or kills trees by decreasing the oxygen supply to the roots. Inadequate oxygen interferes with metabolic processes and root growth. Once root growth slows down, the supply of water and minerals to the tree is diminished. Lack of root growth and consequent decreases in water uptake lead to water stress in the shoots, thereby reducing photosynthesis but increasing respiration. Decreased nitrification and eventual loss of nitrogen to the tree reduce vigor and growth and may eventually kill it. -- Rita McKenzie ☺



Fill injury from raised grade

With permission, this figure has been reprinted from *Disease of Shade Trees*, Terry A. Tattar, Revised Edition 1989, Academic Press, Inc.

YARD

Preemergence Herbicides

Zac Reicher, Turfgrass Extension Specialist

The following and previous Turf Tips with accompanying photos when available, latest editions of mentioned publications, and other information are available on-line at <<http://www.agry.purdue.edu/agronomy/turf/turf.htm>>.

Do I Need to use a Preemergence Herbicide? In order to cut the cost of maintaining your lawn and minimize the pesticides introduced to our environment, reconsider if you really need to apply a preemergence herbicide. Did you have crabgrass last year? If not, you might not need to apply a herbicide. Do you have a thick lawn? Do you mow the lawn at three inches? Do you fertilize your lawn in the fall to improve density? Do you water properly? If you answered "yes" to all these questions, you may not need to apply a herbicide. Or if you have only small areas in your lawn that are problematic like next to sidewalks and drives, consider applying herbicide only to those areas. Postemergence herbicides can be used late in May and June if a crabgrass problem appears later.

Choosing a Preemergence Herbicide: All of the preemergence herbicides labelled for cool season turf are effective in controlling crabgrass. Products most commonly available in retail stores include pendimethalin (most of the Scott's products contain this), Barricade (proflumicarb), Dimension (dithiopyr), and Team (benfen+trifluralin). Avoid trifluralin labeled for agriculture (Treflan) or ornamentals (Preen), because it is illegal for you to apply these to turf and they will damage your turf. Try to purchase products that contain little or no nitrogen or those that contain mostly slow release nitrogen sources like sulfur- or polymer-coated urea, urea formaldehyde, methylenediurea, dimethylenetriurea or natural organic nitrogen. Refer to *AY-10, Crabgrass Control in Home Lawns* for more information.

Using a Preemergence Herbicide for Crabgrass Control: Though cultural practices provide the most effective crabgrass control, herbicides may be necessary in some cases. Crabgrass can be controlled through an application of a preemergence herbicide early in the spring. The herbicides available on the market have been shown to be very effective for control of crabgrass, but often control suffers when the product is not applied correctly or when the lawn is not maintained properly. When using preemergence herbicides, keep the following in mind:

1. Maintain a healthy dense lawn.
2. Closely read and follow all label recommendations.
3. Apply the herbicide accurately and uniformly over the lawn.
4. Apply the herbicide early because they will not affect crabgrass already germinated. Early would be late March in southern Indiana and mid-April in northern Indiana.
5. After application, apply enough water to move the herbicide off the leaf blades to the soil surface for maximum control.
6. Do not apply these products over newly-seeded areas or try to seed into areas where these products have been applied recently.
7. Refer to *AY-10, Crabgrass Control in Home Lawns* for more information ☺

HOME

Fruit Flies on your Houseplants?

Corey Gerber, Entomologist



Fungus gnat

Do you have tiny black fruit flies or gnat-like insects buzzing around your houseplants? If so, your plants are likely being bothered by fungus gnats. Fungus gnats are common pests in greenhouses and homes throughout the United States. Adults are black or brown in color, slender, and 1/8 inch in length. They have one pair of delicate, clear wings and have long, slender antennae. Females can lay up to 200 small whitish eggs in the soil.

Larvae of fungus gnats (maggots) are white with shiny black heads and are approximately 1/4 inch in length. Upon hatching, larvae will begin to feed immediately on the roots of plants. As the larvae are mature, they pupate in the soil. In about four to seven days, the adults emerge and will live about one week.

Larvae have the ability to damage plants by feeding on roots and root hairs. Seedlings and young plants are extremely vulnerable to this feeding. The larvae also have the ability to bore into stems, interrupting nutrient and water flow, which decreases the plant's health and vigor. Adults and larvae are both capable of transmitting fungal pathogens.

Perhaps the best advice regarding the management of fungus gnats is to avoid overwatering your houseplants. In addition, insecticides are readily available that can be used to control fungus gnats. Read and follow label directions before using any pesticide. For additional information please refer to Purdue's Extension Publication E-111, *Fungus Gnats and Shore Flies*, available on-line at <<http://www.agcom.purdue.edu/AgCom/Pubs/menu.htm>> or from your local county Cooperative Extension Service Office. ☺

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