

# WEED PROBLEMS



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Master Gardener

**QUESTION:** I went on vacation and now my garden is overrun with weeds. I feel so overwhelmed!

**ANSWER:** After months of attention and care, the dog days of August arrive with their hot dry days following one another in an endless parade. One morning of neglected watering, a sudden onset of an insect pest, a vacation's explosion of weed growth or a random visit by neighborhood deer can create major setbacks.

It's easy for the gardeners of August to feel defeated and weary. Sometimes we just need a fresh perspective.

Forgive yourself the weeds. Gardens don't have to be perfectly weed-free to be productive or enjoyable spaces. This past week, I found a lovely used chaise lounge. Adorned with a clearance cushion, I set it up in the shade just behind my weedy squash.

I pulled weeds for a while. Then I grabbed my book, a glass of wine, and savored the afternoon as a breeze escorted away the heat of the day. I will weed a little more tomorrow. Gardens shouldn't be all work and no play.

Enjoy what is at this moment. August gardens are an eclectic mix of season endings and harvest glory. August is when our gardening hopes and vision stare the realities of time, weather and life smack in the face.

On a cursory glance, perhaps there doesn't seem to be much going on among the spent husks of flowers past, the vacation neglect and the "not-yets" of harvest. But August is the zenith of zinnias and the delight of dahlias.

Sometimes, looking out at my garden in August, I only see the gap between my vision of what I hoped my garden to be and reality. But that does all my efforts a disservice. When I create a bouquet — a little stem of this, a stalk of that, stealing a perfectly ripe blueberry in the



Gardens shouldn't be all work and no play. Forgive yourself for things like weedy squash (left). Zinnias (right) are a popular plant for annual gardens due to how easy and quick they are to grow. The vast range of growing habits also leads to their popularity as they can be anywhere from short and bushy to tall with a singular stalk

process — I realize there is always more than I thought.

Accept that some bugs, deer, dogs and kids are part of the picture. Damage happens. It has been an especially difficult year dealing with deer in my garden. Despite fences of lavender and sage and smelly spray as deterrents (I cannot fence deer out of

my front yard in my neighborhood), I have lost flowers near bloom, the tops of tomato vines (twice) and, especially heartbreaking, the carefully trained branches of a newly established espaliered apple tree.

Set backs. The flowers will have other seasons, the tree will reach again. Other years the deer haven't visited at all. Loss and abundance often walk hand in hand.

Don't compare your garden to a neighbor's, or last year's to

this one. Comparison will rob your joy. Gardens, like lives, have many variables. Some within our control, some not — some definable, some a mystery. All gardens are uniquely beautiful. If you look for beauty, you will find it.

Find joy in the small things. When I pause and let go, magic happens. I catch my great niece's delight as she spies a tiny garter snake, or my dog chasing a butterfly. I notice the native honeysuckle that languished where I first planted it (I feared it was dead) is putting out tiny new leaves, happy in its new home. I marvel at the fleeting glimmer of a dragonfly's wings.

Joy heals the frustrations of things we cannot control.

Have hope. Hope is what drives the gardeners of August to fill their vehicles with the bedraggled, root-bound perennials wilting on August clearance tables everywhere. Despite the challenges of planting in the heat (especially with such compromised plants) we are certain, with enough love and hope they will survive to add beauty to next summer's garden.

And you know, they just might.

Plants are often much more resilient than we think. Those that struggled this year may flourish in the next. Gardening is for the long haul. No matter the fortunes of our garden at this moment, the season will come to a close. And next spring, we get to begin anew.



**Dahlias are tuberous perennials, and most have simple leaves that are segmented and toothed or cut. The compound flowers may be white, yellow, red or purple in color.**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JULIE BURCHSTEAD

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu) or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 S E Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the Oregon State University Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.