

Weeds unwelcome with veggies

There's plenty of ways to keep unwanted foliage away from vegetables in your garden



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Question: Every year I spend lots of time and effort in preventing the weeds from overtaking my vegetable garden. What is an easy and effective way to weed my vegetable garden?

Answer: Anyone who has ever planted a vegetable garden shares your desire to find an easy and effective way to get rid of the weeds once and for all. There are several effective ways to slow down the growth of weeds and to reduce the quantity – however, a “once and for all” solution probably doesn't exist.

The key to keeping weeds at bay is planning, prevention and perseverance. You have to use a variety of techniques to protect your vegetables from being overrun by those pesky weeds because the weeds will compete with your vegetables for the available water, light and nutrients.

In addition to producing fresh vegetables, most gardeners want their garden to look a certain way and the appearance of weeds disturbs the desired look of the landscape.

Most gardens contain a lot more weed seeds than we can imagine. Weed seeds germinate very quickly in freshly-tilled or disturbed soil. Unfortunately, summer annual weeds germinate rapidly before the vegetables become well-established.

Weeds seem to grow more aggressively than what is actually planted. Many a gardener has experienced frustration when the weeds seem to be gaining the upper hand in the vegetable garden.

PLANNING

Weed management actually begins long before the first seed or transplant is in the ground. You must take into consideration the layout of your garden area, weeds that may already be present, the type of tools you have available for your use and your own



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personal gardening philosophy.

For instance, are you going to plant in raised beds, containers, or in more traditional rows inground? How are you going to water? When planning your garden, realistically consider the time and physical effort that will be required to have a productive garden.

Also, every gardener has a different tolerance for weeds. What is your tolerance level? Will you use herbicides, or not? It is important to consider your own personal gardening philosophy as you plan for your vegetable garden.

PREVENTION

When managing weeds in the vegetable garden, prevention is key.

When you bring home container plants from nurseries, garden exchanges or plant sales, pay attention to what else may be in the pot. Remove any signs of weeds before placing the new plants into your garden.

Weeds need water to germinate, so instead of watering a broad garden area and then having to weed that same area, use drip irrigation and apply water directly to the desired



Use drip irrigation and apply water directly to the desired plants to avoid providing the water weeds need to germinate.

plants. This keeps much of the garden dry but reduces the growth of weeds.

Mulching can be an alternative to weeding. Mulching provides weed suppression because when bare soil is covered, many weed seeds just can't germinate or grow through the mulch. If you have weeds with runners, black plastic or landscape fabrics are the best choices. If you don't have weeds with runners, then the best choice is thick layers of organic mulch. Organic mulches

suppress the growth of weeds, conserve moisture and tend to improve the soil as they break down. Organic mulch may be shredded bark, shredded leaves, straw, pine needles, compost or newspaper. For garden paths, newspaper, old carpeting or similar materials covered with sawdust provide excellent weed suppression.

PERSEVERANCE

Here is where the hard work comes in. Every day, the gardener must be on the lookout for pesky weeds. It is most effective

to remove weeds when they are young and tender. If they have not gone to seed, it is fine to turn them under using a hoe.

If they have gone to seed, you will need to hand pull and throw away. Don't use a hoe on weeds that have gone to seed or have flowered because you will just be planting weed seeds.

The best time to pull or hoe weeds is when the soil is damp but not wet. A day or two after a rain or irrigation is probably the best time.

If you weed when the soil is too wet, you can damage the soil structure. When the soil is too dry, weeds are much harder to pull or hoe. Planning, prevention and perseverance are the keys to keep in mind to manage weeds in the vegetable garden.

It's a lot of work, but the reward of fresh vegetables is worth the effort.

Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, by phone at 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.