

## The Whacky World of Weeds

You may have noticed that during these interminable days of seasonal super temperatures both the flowers and weed look grand. It is the gardeners who need rescuing. Beebalm, coreopsis, cone flowers, Stokes' aster, daylilies – their vivid colors appear undaunted by heat and humidity and you just have to ignore the tangle of weeds surrounding them.

Some of us have unhappily lost the battle with the weeds. In earlier years when air-conditioning was not so prevalent it seemed no great effort to go outside early and late and keep the weeds under control. Most of us avoid heavy duty weed killers out of concern for our own health, that of our pets and neighbors and that of the planet. There are non-toxic approaches.

Pulling them, of course, works best, especially if done early in the season before the seeds mature. Unfortunately some weeds not only reproduce by seeds but gallop to new areas by stealth, underground. Japanese stilt grass comes to mind. This invasive pest has become rampant in Virginia. My first experience with it was so long ago I had to consult out-of-state sources to identify the few specimens I had. Now I am able to gather it by the armload. This is not the kind of progress I appreciate.

When the weeds appear in the cracks in paving or in gravel they can be difficult to pull. Some people suggest using salt. However salt can poison the soil under the paving stones. It is difficult to know how far the poisoning extends, depending on whether the soil is sandy, rain frequency, and so forth. The green bits that appear between flagstones can be charming when low growing plants or mosses move in.

Vinegar will discourage some weeds in gravel but may require several applications. Truly determined weed vigilantes often arm themselves with a flame gun. This marvelous device works best on broad-leaved annual weeds as well as on those perennial weeds making early inroads onto your property. The flame gun is designed to 'cook' the plant by raising the temperature of the sap until it bursts cells, killing the plant. I do not know if the perennial plants will rejuvenate from the roots. Using the flame gun is one of those things that is such a power trip, the wielder will welcome the weeds perhaps?

These machines come in sizes large enough for use in orchards and other commercial settings. Keep away from children and hook up a handy hose before you start, just in case.

Years ago I remember an elderly neighbor attaching her weeds with teakettle in hand. Boiling water will kill weeds but it also kills all those marvelous microorganisms that keep the soil healthy but patios and such can probably benefit from the handy teakettle approach.

One of the newer things in garden shops is corn gluten. Mixed with water and plugged into paving cracks it will keep weeds from growing. However it won't kill a plant that has already started growing.

Possibly the best treatment for any weeds that appear in your lawn is to just keep mowing them. Green is green and few people are going to check your lawn for horticultural impurities. Life is too short to worry about lawn diversity.

My most troublesome weed is trumpet vine, *Campsis radicans*. It bloomed briefly from the top of a holly tree months ago, as a gesture of defiance. I have dug it out and cut it off for more than ten years. I have read that if I repeatedly lop it off at the roots it will eventually give up. I wish I could believe it but I expect it will be here long after I am gone.

As a child some time ago (don't ask) I remember grandmothers visiting neighborhood lawns in spring and neatly removing dandelion plants before they flowered. The greens were delicious but I suspect some of those bagged treasures contributed to dandelion wine, a solace during that period between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Amendments. That experiment lent credence to the futility of legislating virtue, sigh.

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