

## Take It Easy!

If you like most of the gardeners I know, when you go outside to pull a few weeds, twilight descends while you are trying to distinguish pesky purslane from pretty portulaca. The only way most compulsive weeders can discipline their addiction is to leave town or lose their tools.

Leaving town is not fatal. You think you are indispensable to the health and welfare of your bit of the kingdom, but it will survive. Losing tools is more critical. I misplaced my favorite recently for the first time in the more than 30 years I have had it. A search through several gardening magazines demonstrated that the only company which sold the “weeder/rooter” does not advertise. It was most distressing.

All sorts of abduction scenarios ran through my mind. If I had not misplaced it in decades, I couldn't be guilty, could I? A few days later I found it under an azalea exactly where I had dropped it to free both hands to yank out a few yards of trumpet vine.

The day after that came “Walt Nicke's Garden Talk [www.gardentalk.com](http://www.gardentalk.com) .” This catalog published only twice a year, is 5 1/2” x 8 1/2”, 62 black & white pages, and full of great stuff.

The “weeder/rooter” is still sold at \$19.95, but little more than I paid 30 years ago.

The hardwood handle is 15” long and 7”x2” heat-treated steel head has teeth on one side and a small mattock on the other and levers out weeds, cuts roots, and excavates for bulbs and small plants. One man's meat is another man's poison, but I must have this particular tool;. (I remember watching gardeners in the Philippines care for gardens with nothing but a push mower and a skillfully wielded machete. Impressive.)

## CABBAGES & KINGS

I hope you have had blackberry cobbler recently. It is one of those rewards for living where there are untended hedgerows. However, not all blackberries are wild. New to me was information about a cultivated blackberry developed by the University of Arkansas in 1996 called “Kiowa.” These berries are the stars on pick-your own berry patches farther south.

Native to the United States, these thorny fruits are plentiful enough but heat, thorns, mosquitoes and chiggers dull our enthusiasm for picking them. The truly sweet Kiowa is remarkable for its size, huge, and its long, six week fruiting season with the end-of-season berries as large as the early ones.

Since this berry fruits its second year patience is required. They should be planted in February or March in a site getting eight hours of sun. They need twice-a-week watering if

it is dry. With blackberries it is hard to tell when they are sweet-ripe. (The birds know, but like most of their tidbits, they tend to gobble them up half-ripe to not detriment to their digestive systems.)

Some experienced berry-pickers say they are ripe when the shine is a bit dull. For cobbler a bit of sugar can solve the picked-too-early problem. An unnamed variety is in the research pipeline at the University of Arkansas which will fruit it first year. That, of course, will make it more popular in our instant-everything world.

## ONGOING INVASION

It is not just kudzu! Economic costs of invasive aliens run to some \$500,000,000 lost by crops to weeds and by losses in the fishing and lumber industries. The actual cost of attacking these invaders runs \$137 billion each year, an amount greater than other natural disasters. In many cases, it is not economically possible to cure the problem. The best hope is prevention.

Kudzu, which was imported from Japan to prevent erosion, now covers 7 million acres. Another alien, Chinese wisteria, is invasive in the Southeast and the Norway maple has escaped to woodlands creating a single species desert. We've heard all this before, and every time I hear it, I pull out more strands of the English ivy which is such an expensive threat in our mid-Atlantic area. It is so natural to want something new and different, but it is wiser to use the plentiful native plants.