

Removing difficult weeds from your garden

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Most weeds can be controlled by my mulching and ground sheeting techniques without the use of chemicals, but when you are overrun with one of the top 5, it's time to reach for some additional help.

Top 5 Garden weeds

Couch Grass
Mares Tail
Brambles
Bind Weed
Japanese Knot Weed



Japanese knot-weed

Normally this additional help comes in the form of a chemical weed killer containing Glyphosate or better known by its trade name Roundup.

Most gardeners by their very nature are opposed to the use of chemicals in the garden and at GardenAdvice.co.uk we do not recommend chemical use often. But in the case of these weeds we feel that in most cases it is the best method.

Over the years we have developed a cultural method of dealing with these weeds which is to cover the ground with black plastic, however to be effective, the cover has to be left in place for two years. For some well-organized individuals this is possible but for the rest of us waiting two years before starting out gardening project is a little too long.

How it works

In simple terms, Glyphosate weed killers give the weeds or targeted plants a massive dose of steroids by removing some of the natural growth inhibitors contained within a plants cells and the plant simply out-grows itself, collapses and dies.

For this reason in the first few weeks after use, the chemical seems to be helping the weed plants, they will grow and look healthier than before for a short period of time. Until the day when, seemingly over-night, they will collapse as the growth effort eventually kills them.

With this knowledge it is easy to get the maximum benefit from the weed killer.

Glyphosate Usage Guidelines

Firstly because the weed plants need to take up the chemical from the leaves (applied by a spray or watering can with a fine rose), it is important to apply on a dry day when the plant is in a growing state. This means in weather conditions that

produce growth with regards to temperature and soil moisture levels, late spring being a good example.

However with changing weather conditions these conditions present themselves several times a year.

Secondly it is important to understand that the chemical enters through the leaves or any other green part of the plant for example green stems on roses. This means that whatever green part of a plant you apply the weed killer to; it will kill that plant including your prize shrubs and perennials. So be careful if your weeds are growing in between your plants as often happens with couch grass, you need to use the chemical in a very direct way such as applying with a paint brush or in a gel with a weed stick.

On the other hand this might work to your advantage for example in the base of an established hedge where it might be possible to spray the weeds amongst the bare stems at the base of the hedge without effecting the hedge as the stems are not green and do not contain chlorophyll.

Once applied, the chemical that hits the ground is very quickly degraded by soil bacteria, but it is a requirement that pets and children are kept away from the area for a day to allow the chemical to dry and become neutralised.

It's worth pointing out that glyphosate is quite safe unlike chemicals that contain paraquat, which is extremely lethal even in small doses to both humans and animals, however, ironically, plants with substantial root systems can often recover.

Notes on the use on certain plants

Horse-tail or Mares-tail

(*Equisetum Arvense*)



Horse-tail

This is one of the most difficult weeds to eradicate in a garden situation. Once spotted it is important to go to work immediately. It is a perennial weed, which grows in a wide variety of places from boggy ground to sand dunes. It has two types of growth, in spring brown asparagus-like shoots appear with cones at the tips and these produce spores. Later the more familiar thin green, branched stems appear and these remain until the winter. Both are produced from creeping underground rhizomes, which go down about 1.5 metres.

Horse-tail is resistant to most weed killers, but Glyphosate may have some success after repeated treatment. The GardenAdvice.co.uk team has had some success by crushing the stems to break the waxy surface and then applying Glyphosate in the form of Roundup, with a small paintbrush. Glyphosate has the advantage of keeping the plant alive whilst the chemical travels from one cell to another in the plant before killing it. Persistent applications will kill it after 5 months.

Hedge and Field Bindweed

(*Calystegia Sepium* and *Convolvulus Arvensis*)



Bindweed

Bindweed is a difficult plant to control, however with the use of glyphosate it is possible to eradicate it fairly quickly. It is a climbing herbaceous perennial, spreading by creeping underground stems, which root readily into virgin soil. Before the use of chemicals such as glyphosate digging it out was the best way to control it. The main problem with this method is that every small piece of root left turned into a new plant. With the roots being brittle it is almost impossible to remove the entire root, so inevitably

after a short period of time the problem returns, only this time it had become at least twice the size. As with Horsetail it is best to apply the glyphosate with a small paintbrush directly to the leaves. Unlike Horsetail it should only take one or two applications to control the bindweed.

Other methods include hoeing repeatedly to exhaust the bindweed as new stems appear. The two different types of bind weed as self-explanatory. One is more inclined to climb that the other but the control is the same.

Couch grass (Dog's Grass, Twitch)

(*Agropyrum Repens*, syn. *Elymus Repens*)



Couch grass

The most common of our difficult weeds, the couch grass is a perennial grass with creeping underground stems with small fibrous roots at every joint.

You can find couch grass in most gardens, under hedges and at the back of borders. It is not a major problem until it becomes unchecked. Then over a period of time it takes a firm grip and starts to spread rampantly.

On large areas containing couch or in-between shrubs the GardenAdvice team tends to clear the majority of the weed, then allow the remaining roots to re-shoot and spray with Glyphosate allowing the systemic action to kill the couch over a period of about 6 weeks. As with bind weed two applications might be needed.

Brambles

(*Rubus Fruitosus*)



Bramble treatment

Not too hard to remove by hand if you only have one or two but in a large area it can soon form a thicket. It spreads by stem layering and underground stems. As soon as a stem tip hits the soil it roots so the thicket is forever growing outwards.

The best course of action is to cut the brambles back and spray them with Glyphosate as they re-shoot again. This plant will need several applications to achieve the desired effect.

Japanese Knot Weed (Polygonum Cuspidatum)



Japanese knot-weed

Without doubt the first U.K super-weed introduced in Victorian times as the ideal plant for stabilizing banks around new lakes, it has rapidly spread all over the country into every piece of spare or vacant lane, including derelict house gardens and railway embankments.

If you have this weed in your garden then prepare for a long fight. The best solution so far seems to be to treat the plant in the autumn with an application of Glyphosate and then when the plant re-shoots in the spring hit it with two further applications until it starts to die back.

Spot Weeding



Spot-weeding

Chemicals in a hand sprayer can be used as a handy spot weeder. For example if you have mares tail weed in your garden as you see the new shoot emerging from the ground you can zap them with your hand sprayer and stay on top of the weed. If the weed is growing in amongst your favoured plants you can use a weed stick for greater control.

Chemical Storage

As with all chemicals you are best to buy only the amount you need at any one time as stock piling only creates out of date chemicals and wastes money. If you do need to store it then lock it up in a dry, secure place, out of the way of children and animals, away from food stores and

make sure it is labelled clearly.

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