

Watch out for Weeds

BENEFICIAL LANDSCAPES

Rachel Anderson

Many weeds love bare ground, and new plantings offer this in bounty. Here are some tips to help you prevent undesirable plants from getting a foothold in years one and two.



- **Start a routine.** The growing season gets busy, and it can be tempting to leave weeds for “next week.” However, if “next week” turns into “next month,” what began as a modest task can grow into a monstrous one. Keep weeds down to a manageable level by scheduling regular check-ins—then devise a strategy for sticking to them. This might mean setting up phone reminders, or recruiting a reliable partner who will hold you to your word. We advise reserving an hour a week or 2-3 hours every other week in the morning or evening to avoid the heat of the day.
- **Is that a weed? Find out for sure.** Most folks have trouble telling weeds from other plants when a garden is young. If you see a plant and you’re not sure what it is or how to deal with it, take a picture of it with your phone and email that to your local Extension office. You can also try to look it up yourself in a Nebraska or Midwest weed guide. If you’re still stumped, wait until the plant is in flower; it will be much easier to identify—and a great time to remove or treat many non-woody weeds is when they are blooming (just be sure to get them before they produce seeds).
- **Spend your energy on the worst weeds first.** Not all weeds behave aggressively long-term. Some are benign, fizzling out on their own as a landscape matures; others are malignant, eventually overtaking desirable plants. You’ll want to pay attention to the latter (this is when knowing your weeds comes in handy) and treat these problem weeds as your highest priority. Rather than starting at one end and weeding everything indiscriminately as you move along, try to assess the entire area, identify the biggest bullies and eradicate these as best you can. This is an effective way to manage a new landscape when time is tight and weeds are plenty. If there are more priority weeds than you have time for, strategize by focusing first on tall weeds, woody weeds and weeds in flower. Then leave the rest for next week.
- **Pick the right method for the job.** When you identify a weed that needs to be managed, should you pull it, spray it, cut it, mow it, or something else? There are tradeoffs for each technique—do what works for your situation. We recommend consulting a weed guide for tips on how to best deal with specific species. You can also ask Extension or consult Backyard Farmer’s website. If you do decide to pull by hand, cover the spot back up with mulch or flower seeds so new weeds can’t take hold.

ABOVE: Violets and dandelions, weeds or wildflowers? “One person’s weed is another person’s wildflower,” Susan Wittig Albert