

My Yard – June

Weeding Less, a Gardener’s Goal

A long, cool spring and sudden heat dramatically compressed the gardening season this year, making it hard to keep up with all the growth, particularly the growth of weeds.

In an informal survey several years ago, weeding was the “most hated garden chore.” There are some people who enjoy it, granted, but they are a small and welcome-to-my-yard-any-time minority.

What to do? Here’s a few thoughts:

- Our notions of which plants are weeds and which are the most troublesome, vary greatly. Weed management is not a one-size-fits-all approach.
- Be considerate of neighbors but remember some are beneficial to pollinators or the larger environment and most are cyclical in nature, constantly changing with fluctuations in sun, shade, moisture and temperature. What’s problematic right now may be gone in a month (possibly to be replaced with another set of challenges, but one day at a time).
- Morning or nightly walks are one of the best ways to control weeds. Walk your garden perimeter and pull weeds you see emerging. Fifteen minutes every day can save you from the drudgery of weeding marathons. It also allows you to enjoy all the small moments—new leaves emerging, flowers budding and insects visiting.
- Do your weeding when soil is moist to remove as much of the roots as possible.
- Figure out the tools that work best and that you enjoy using. Both hand and power tools have their appropriate place. Just remember that power tools can destroy the quiet that most gardeners, and their neighbors, seek in the outdoors.
- If it’s a large area that you simply can’t keep up with, solarize it with clear plastic in hot weather or smother weeds with cardboard or newspapers and a layer of leaves or grass clippings before replanting.
- Weeds will take advantage of any bare spots left open, so it’s best to minimize bare space. One way is to mulch, even better is to plant so heavily that weeds can’t get a foothold. (See photo above.)
- There are lots of great ways to gather more plants to fill bare spots. Divide plants you already have, exchange plants with neighbors and choose plants that can be divided in the future.
- Herbicides, when properly used, are a good option to help with weed control in large areas. Glyphosate (the active ingredient in RoundUp) has almost no soil activity and breaks down quickly in the environment, making it relatively safe to use around trees, shrubs and perennials when care is taken to avoid over-spraying onto non-target plants. Be aware that glyphosate will not kill dandelions and a growing list of other broadleaf weeds.
- Keep in mind that herbicides like 2,4-D and dicamba can drift or volatilize into the atmosphere, causing damage to nearby trees, shrubs and other non-target plants, especially in early spring when leaves are just emerging. Always read and follow label directions when applying herbicides and try to use them as a last resort.
- If needed, fall treatment is far more effective for long-term control.
- Not everyone has an outdoor space, so enjoy what you have and make the most of it, for your family, neighbors and all the birds, butterflies and other creatures that share it with you.

