



GROWING YOUR GARDEN

Keeping your learning garden weed free: Garden Guide

Weeds are a common issue that gardeners everywhere have to deal with. Weeds are simply plants growing where people do not want them to grow. Mostly, they are an issue because they compete with the food we grow and tend to grow more vigorously than food crops. Some weeds are more difficult to deal with than others, but, in general, there are a few things you can do to easily manage the weeds that may show up in your garden

Plant a weed-free garden

Make sure your garden is weed-free before you plant it. Remove any particularly difficult weeds (including their roots) and turn over the top six inches of soil before you plant. If you begin growing your garden with no weeds and use the following 5 steps, you can easily have a healthy, weed-free garden.



Maintain a weed free garden

1. **Get to know the plants in your garden!** Any plant growing in your garden that you did not plant is a weed. Typically, you do not need to identify weeds so much as identify what plants you want to have growing in your garden. If you did not plant it, pull it.
2. **Plant in predictable patterns.** If you fill a garden with four rows of carrots, everything that comes up outside of those four rows of plants is a weed. Simple gardening plans usually allow for easy identification of weeds.
3. **Young weeds are much easier to remove than mature weeds.** Till the top inch of garden soil once a month. To "till," means to break up and turn over the soil. If you till the surface of your garden between the plants you are growing, this will disturb and kill any weed seeds that may be establishing and you will avoid bigger

problems down the road. Tilling will also allow your soil to soak in water more easily.

4. **Always remove weeds before they go to seed.** One weed plant can produce thousands of seeds that you may end up dealing with for years to come.
5. **Mulch in between your plants.** If the soil remains covered in mulch, it will be more difficult for weed seeds to germinate and become an issue. Mulching is best used to cover space between seedlings. Mulch is not effective if you have planted a garden full of rows of seeds.

The following list introduces three common weeds with different challenges and solutions.

Bindweed

Profile: Bindweed is a particularly fast growing vine, and difficult weed to remove. You may pull it out in one spot only to find it come back in several locations the next week.

Unique Challenge: Bindweed usually spreads by the roots. A new bindweed plant can grow from any piece of root left underground. This is why it can feel like a 'Medusa Plant' when you think you have pulled it out and find that the plant aggressively sprouts up in several other locations.

Solution: You will have to dig out all roots and parts of roots in your garden. Bindweed roots snap easily, so rather than pulling the roots until they snap, dig lightly following roots throughout the garden and pull out the entire root system. If your garden has a bindweed problem, pull the above ground stems when they appear. This plant will not outcompete your other plants until it strangles them with above ground vines.



Weeds with similar challenges: Mint, Crab Grass, Thistle

Thistle



Plant Profile: Thistle is a tall plant with very sharp spikes along its stem and leaves. You may pull or chop this plant out of your garden only to see it come back stronger than before.

Unique Challenge: Thistle will quickly establish very deep roots which often snap when pulled. Thistle will regrow from any piece of root left in the soil. When mature, it will also begin to grow horizontal roots and spread.

Solution: Before you plant a garden with existing thistle issues, you will need to dig out all the roots. These roots will likely reach to the bottom of your Learning Garden.

Other weeds with a deep taproot: Dandelion, Mallow

Lamb's Quarter

Plant Profile: Lamb's Quarter is a common weed found in gardens. Despite it being an undesirable plant, it's common name is Wild Spinach and it has tasty edible leaves.

Unique Challenge: When Lamb's Quarter goes to seed, it will drop thousands of seeds in your garden's soil. These seeds will wait to grow in your garden until ideal conditions exist.



Solution: Pull all Lamb's Quarter weeds before they go to seed. Plants will pull easily when young so be sure to pull them before they grow large.

Other weeds that seed aggressively: Almost all weeds