

Lawn and Garden Weeds: Descriptions & Control

These are examples of harmful weeds that are highly destructive and difficult to control. Several community homes with crabgrass and quackgrass took over lawns and spread to neighbors' lawns in 2020. In an effort to help keep our neighborhood beautiful, we look for infestation of weeds. We have identified the following weeds in our subdivision: quackgrass, crabgrass, chickweed, purslane, dandelion, creeping charlie, nutsedge, smartweed, and pigweed. Enclosed are photographs of these weeds plus some others that are known to our area. We encourage you to walk around your property to determine if any of the following weeds are prevalent in your lawn, in which case remedies for control can be found below. Thank you.

QUACKGRASS (*ELYTRIGIA REPENS*)



Image: Quackgrass in strawberry garden.

Quackgrass is a creeping, persistent perennial grass that reproduces by seeds. Its long, jointed, straw-colored rhizomes form a heavy mat in soil, from which new shoots may also appear.

How to Control Quackgrass

Try to dig out this fast-growing grass as soon as you see it in your garden, being sure to dig up the entirety of the plant (including the roots). Dispose of in your waste bin rather than the compost pile, as it will likely continue to grow in the latter!

CRABGRASS (*DIGITARIA SPP.*)

Crabgrass is a low-growing, summer annual that spreads by seed and from rootings of nodes that lie on the soil. Unmowed, it can grow to 2 feet tall.



Crabgrass. Photo by R. Dyer, Bugwood.org



CHRISTIAN ELBERT/SHUTTERSTOCK

Crabgrass is another invasive plant that's easy to remove by hand. Trouble is, if it gets established in your lawn, that could mean a lot of hand-weeding. This weed appears from mid-spring through summer when the ground is warm. It grows well under dry, hot conditions. Crabgrass is most noticeable in the heat of the summer, as it remains green and vibrant-looking even in drought. Unfortunately, that just makes a drought-stressed lawn look worse. You can treat with a pre-emergent herbicide in spring, or spot-treat with a nonselective herbicide during the growing season, being careful not to hurt surrounding grass. Always apply on a calm day.

How to Control Crabgrass

Fortunately, crabgrass is fairly easy to manage. Controlling crabgrass before it sets seed is important, because the seeds can remain viable for at least 3 years in soil.

In the lawn, mowing regularly is often all you need to prevent them from flowering and producing seed. Most experts recommend that you mow your lawn to a height of 2 to 4 inches and that you mow frequently enough to keep it within that range.

Also, if you keep a lawn, be sure to select grass adapted to your location so it's a healthy, thick lawn. Because seedling crabgrass isn't very competitive, a vigorously growing turf will crowd out new seedlings. Perennial ryegrass is the best competition for crabgrass. It also provides some insect control, as it emits a natural poison that gives some small, damaging bugs the "flu." Fertilizing is key and must be done in the spring and in the fall. Crabgrass thrives in compacted lawns, so aeration can help. A mixture of 1 pint of hydrogen peroxide, diluted to 3 percent, per 100 square feet of lawn can help eradicate the pesky plant.

Organic mulches that have been on the soil for a while decomposing can provide an adequate growth medium for weeds to germinate and grow in. If crabgrass is germinating in the mulch, move it about with a rake to reduce seedling establishment. Hand pull escaped crabgrass plants before they set seed.

CHICKWEED (*STELLARIA SP. & CERASTIUM SPP.*)

Common chickweed (*Stellaria media*) is a winter annual that grows in well-watered areas. It's a reservoir for insect pests and plant viruses.



Photo credit: <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/>

When growing without competition from other plants, common chickweed can produce approximately 800 seeds and it takes 7 to 8 years to eradicate. Chickweed thrives in moist, cool areas so it often gets started before spring crops can become competitive and can limit vegetable harvest.

Common chickweed is often forms a dense mats and rarely grows higher than 2 inches. The flowers are small with five white petals. Common chickweed will grow in a wide range of soils but does particularly well in neutral pH soils with high nitrogen and poorly in low pH or acid soils.

How to Control Chickweed

Fortunately, annual chickweed is easier to control as long as you pull the weed when the plant is small and before it flowers. The challenge can be locating it during the short period between germination and flower production, so be sure to monitor closely and completely remove the weed so it doesn't reroot.

Remember this is a “winter annual.” So, monitor the soil surface for chickweed seedlings throughout late fall and winter and then remove them by shallow cultivation or by hand pulling.

Using an organic mulch such as wood chips, at least two inches deep, will reduce the amount of weed seeds germinating by limiting light and serving as a physical barrier. Synthetic mulches such as landscape fabrics may also be used. In landscaped areas, they should be covered with an additional layer of mulch (rock or bark). Vegetable gardens also can utilize black plastic, both as mulch into which seeds or transplants are placed and also between rows.

By spring time, we would not recommend chemical controls for this winter annual in the garden. In late fall, consider preemergent herbicides as a last resort.

PURSLANE (*PORTULACA OLERACEA*)

Purslane is actually considered noxious in at least one U.S. state. However, this is not a widespread categorization. So, why is purslane considered so troublesome?

The answer goes back to the definition of weeds: Purslane can produce over 2,000,000 seeds per plant. Purslane also can reproduce vegetatively through its leaves, making it especially tough to eradicate. Many a gardener hoed purslane one day only to see it growing at full strength the next.



VOLODYMYR NIKITENKO/SHUTTERSTOCK

Purslane is a broadleaf, annual, succulent-like weed that reproduces by tiny black seeds and stem fragments. This weed appears in late spring or early summer and likes warm weather, fertile soil and moist garden beds.

How to Control Purslane

The primary method of management for common purslane is prevention. In home landscapes and gardens, this weed is generally managed by hand-weeding. Pull out this weed as soon as you see it and destroy the plant; this weed can live in your soil for years!

Mulching is also helpful, especially in garden beds. To be effective, organic mulches should be at least 3 inches thick. Synthetic mulches (plastic or fabric mulch) which screen out light and provide a physical barrier to seedling development, also work well. Fabric mulches, which are porous and allow flow of water and air to roots, are preferred over plastics. Combinations of synthetic mulches with organic or rock mulches on top are commonly used in ornamental plantings.

DANDELION (*TARAXACUM OFFICINALE*)



In time, dandelions will also take over any habitat from your garden to your ornamentals to your grasses. They have the most weedy characteristics of all the weeds. Not only do dandelions have wind-borne seed but also reproduce vegetatively thanks to large tap roots. So unless you cut the root deep into the soil, you can rest assured the plant will reemerge.

How to Control Dandelions

Removing dandelions by hand-pulling or hoeing is often futile, unless done repeatedly over a long period of time, because of the deep tap root system of established plants. But if you have a small area, pull young dandelions by grasping them firmly by their base and wiggling gently, as you must dislodge their deep taproot from the soil. Alternatively, use a hand trowel to dig them out. Try to remove the whole dandelion root at once, as any piece left in the ground will probably grow back.

If you keep a lawn, a vigorous (and competitive) lawn will slow down dandelion infestation. Dense turfgrass and ornamentals shade the soil surface, reducing the establishment of new dandelion seedlings. Many broadleaf weeds may be controlled with mowing but this is NOT true of dandelion. Because it grows from a basal rosette that is lower than a mower blade can reach, mowing will have no effect on control.

For a garden bed, mulches of wood chips or bark are effective if they are maintained at a depth of least 3 inches deep (and replaced over time). Mulching with landscape fabrics can be particularly effective for controlling seedlings, reducing the amount of light that is able to reach the soil. Use a polypropylene or polyester fabric or black polyethylene (plastic tarp) to block all plant growth.

Solitary new dandelion plants along fence rows, roadsides, flower beds, and in turfgrass should be grubbed out (removed by digging out the entire plant, taproot and all) before they produce seed. Dandelion knives and similar specialized tools are available for removing individual weeds and their roots while minimizing soil disturbance. Monitor the area for several months to make sure that removal of the taproot was complete.

If you're using herbicides, consider pre-emergence herbicides such as those containing dithiopyr or isoxaben because they are applied to the soil BEFORE the seeds germinate.

CREEPING CHARLIE (*GLECHOMA HEDERACEA*)



WILLIAM HAGER/SHUTTERSTOCK

Creeping Charlie (also known as ground ivy) and also wild violet are common in shady lawns. Native to Europe, it has become an invasive lawn weed in North America. The plant has bright green leaves with scalloped edges on creeping stems that root at the nodes. It is adaptable to sun or shade, and it even has violet-purple flowers in late spring. It is vigorous which is the real problem. Creeping Charlie runs roughshod through the garden or lawn, forming a dense mat and smothering other plants, including lawns.

The reason Creeping Charlie is so challenging is the way it spreads—by both seeds and by creeping stems (called stolons) that grow along the ground. If you try to dig it out and leave behind a fragment of rhizome (root), even a tiny piece can grow up as a new plant!

How to Control Creeping Charlie

- Improve turf density by seeding grasses in shady areas which will help to limit this weed from spreading.
- Also, make sure to grow the most suitable type of turfgrass for the location (e.g., plant shade tolerant turfgrass varieties under trees).
- Improve soil drainage or water less frequently to dry the soil.
- Mow regularly (to a height of two to three and one-half inches), fertilizing and watering appropriately, and overseeding in the fall.

Alternatively, consider removing grass and growing shade-loving plants such as vinca, English ivy, pachysandra, or [hosta](#) that compete well with weeds (though they can also become weeds themselves, so plant at your own risk!). In areas where Creeping Charlie has become established, try removing plants by hand. This is the control method of choice in vegetable or flower gardens. Try to pull the weed without breaking it and over time it may give up.

However, this may not be a viable option in heavily infested areas, as the extensive spreading stems of creeping Charlie can be difficult to completely remove. If you have mats of weed, smother with newspaper or tarp. Once plants are pulled, make sure to dispose of the plants in such a way that they cannot re-root. You can also treat these invasive plants with a broadleaf herbicide, but you may need to make several applications over the course of several weeks.

NUTSEDGE (*CYPERUS SPP.*)



Nutsedges are perennial weeds that superficially resemble grasses, but they are thicker and stiffer and V-shaped. Their leaves are arranged in sets of three from their base instead of sets of two as you would find in grass leaves. They are among the most problematic weeds for vegetable crops and can greatly reduce harvest yields. Yellow nutsedge has light brown flowers and seeds, while purple nutsedge flowers have a reddish tinge and the seeds are dark brown or black.

How to Control Nutsedge

If you have nutsedge, it's often an indicated that your soil drainage is poor or waterlogged. However, once nutsedge is established, it's very difficult to control.

The best approach is to prevent establishment of the weed in the first place.

Remove small plants before they develop tubers. Tubers are key to nutsedge survival. If you can limit production of tubers, you'll eventually control the nutsedge itself. Most herbicides aren't effective against tubers.

Also, eliminate the wet conditions that favor nutsedge growth. Use mulches in landscape beds. Landscape fabrics are the best mulch because the sharp leaves of nutsedge can pierce other mulches.

SMART WEED



Smartweed (*Polygonum* spp.) grows more than three feet tall so it's not apt to be overlooked in the garden. The modest pink or white flowers are not showy enough to warrant a place in most gardens, so remove by hand or treat with a post-emergent herbicide.

PIGWEEED (*AMARANTHUS* SPP.)

Pigweed wins the title of most “problematic” annual weed. It has evolved traits that makes it a tough competitor, especially in broadleaf crops like soybeans and cotton.



Image: Pigweed. Credit: United Soybean Board.

An annual weed that reproduces by seeds, pigweed is characterized by its fleshly, red taproot. This weed appears in late spring or early summer and likes warm weather.

How to Control Pigweed

Try to pull out this weed before it flowers!

Some weed seeds require light for germination and pigweed is one of those. To prevent pigweed in the future, cover your garden plot with a winter [mulch](#).

Also, till very shallowly in the spring; only turn up a small amount of soil to keep those seeds buried. When you till you may bring up some pigweed seed so it's best to mulch again. Cover the soil with five layers of wet newspaper and cover that with 3-6 inches of mulch.

BINDWEED (*CONVOLVULUS ARVENSIS*)



Image: Bindweed seedling

Field bindweed is a hardy perennial vine that has been given many names, including perennial or wild morning-glory, creeping jenny, sheepbine, cornbind, and bellbine.

Bindweed is NOT the same as the ornamental annual [morning-glory](#) (in the genus *Ipomea*) which has a larger (2-inch wide) and a more showy flower that can be white to blue or purple; it also has a thicker stem that is sometimes hairy and heart-shaped leaves that are 1 1/2 inches wide and 2 inches or more long. The two species are easy to distinguish from each other.

An invasive field bindweed is one of the most persistent and difficult to control weeds. It spreads from an extensive rootstock and from seed. And its roots are found to depths of 14 feet. Lateral roots becoming a secondary vertical root. A single field bindweed plant can spread radially more than 10 feet in a growing season. This extensive underground network allows for overwintering without foliage, and it can persist for many years in the soil.

Bindweed sprouts in late spring and can be seen throughout the summer. Though the plant's flowers are attractive, field bindweed can become a big problem in warm weather, when they spread ruthlessly.

How to Control Bindweed

Unfortunately, tilling and cultivation seems to aide bindweed spread. Fragments of vertical roots and rhizomes as short as 2 inches can form new plants! Field bindweed also is very drought tolerant and once established is difficult to control even with herbicides.

The best control is, as with most weeds, is prevention or early intervention. Seedlings of field bindweed must be removed before they become perennial plants. However, this need to be done when they're young—about 3 to 4 weeks after germination. After that, perennial buds are formed, and successful control is much more difficult.

CANADA THISTLE (*CIRSIIUM ARVENSE*)



Canada thistle is an aggressive, creeping perennial weed from Eurasia (despite its name). It infests crops, pastures, and non-crop areas like ditch banks and roadside. Canada thistle reduces forage consumption in pastures and rangeland because cattle typically will not graze near infestations.

This weed reproduces by seed and whitish, creeping rootstocks which send up new shoots every 8 to 12 inches. Plants 2 to 4 feet tall, It is a colony-forming weed, reproducing asexually from rhizomatous roots (any part of the root system may give rise to new plants) or sexually from wind-blown seed. The plant emerges from its roots in mid- to late spring and forms rosettes.

Then, it will send up shoots every 8 to 12 inches. The plants will grow 2 to 4 feet tall. You may spots its purple flowers are produced in July and August.

How to Control Canada Thistle

Canada thistle is difficult to control because its extensive and deep root system allows it to recover from control attempts. Horizontal roots may extend 15 feet or more and vertical roots may grow 6 to 15 feet deep! Seeds may retain viability 4+ years in the soil.

The first plants need to be destroyed by pulling or hoeing before they become securely rooted. Look for Canada thistle above ground in early spring.

If Canada thistle becomes rooted, the best control is to stress the plant and force it to use stored root nutrients. It's at its weakest during the flowering stage in summertime; this is a good time to begin cultivation and destroy the roots and rootstock. One season of cultivation followed by a season of growing competitive crops such as winter rye, will go a long way toward eradication.

An approved herbicide, applied for two years in an established in a thistle-infested area, is an effective control. Usually, a combination of techniques is needed. Consult with your cooperative extension office for an approved herbicide and suggested program.

BUCKHORN PLANTAIN (*PLANTAGO LANCEOLATA*)

(Also called buck plantain, English plantain, narrow-leaved plantain)

Buckhorn plantain is a common perennial weed more common in pastures, meadows, and lawns. This narrow-leaved weed reproduces and spreads by seeds.



Buckhorn Plantain. Photo by Oregon State University.

How to Control Buckhorn Plantain

Buckhorn plantain is low-growing which makes it difficult to remove by hand. This plant has a long taproot so it can become drought-tolerant and difficult to control.

So, to remove this weed, be diligent about pulling up young plants and destroying it before the plants go to seed. Learn how to scout and recognize young plants to help prevent early introductions from becoming persistent problems.

The best control is also preventative: grow a lush stand so the surface of the soil is shaded and prevents new seeds from getting established.

As a last resort, several herbicides are effective on buckhorn plantain. The best time to spray is in the fall (late October to early December). Speak to your local cooperative for approved products

LAMBSQUARTERS (*CHENOPODIUM ALBUM*)

According to the Weed Science Society of America (WSSA), lambsquarters ranks as one of the most common weeds in North American gardens.



Lambsquarters. Photo by Michigan State University.

Common lambsquarters is a summer annual broadleaf weed that is widely distributed across the northern half of the United States and southern Canada. Thanks to its widespread distribution, it's no surprise that lambsquarters is often a problem in gardens with sugar beets, vegetable crops, and pulse crops such as dry edible beans, lentils, and chickpeas.

Lambsquarters is a very fast-growing annual with seeds that are small and light enough to be blown by the wind over short distances and can sometimes survive for decades in the soil. Under favorable conditions, these weeds can establish themselves quickly and spread profusely.

How to Control Lambsquarters

This summertime weed rapidly removes moisture from soil, so remove it from unwanted areas as soon as possible!

Cultivate lambsquarters out of your garden using a sharp hoe.

SHEPHERD'S PURSE (*CAPSELLA BURSA-PASTORIS*)

Shepherd's purse is actually a Brassicaceae and part of the Mustard family along with cabbage. This flowering annual produces heart-shaped seedpods after flowering. It likes cool weather and its yellowish-brown seeds are long-lived in the ground.



Shepherd's Purse. Photo by Oregon State University.

How to Control Shepherd's Purse

Keep an eye out for its distinct leaves and pull out this annual weed by hand before it seeds. Be sure to remove the entire root.

POISON IVY



TIM MAINIERO/SHUTTERSTOCK

Leaflets three, let it be. Good advice for the majority of people who are allergic to these invasive plants. Some harmless plants are mistaken for poison ivy — young box elder seedlings, for instance. But you'll know for sure if you develop an itchy rash after coming in contact with the sap, which contains urushiol. Poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*) and the related poison oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*) spread not only by underground runners but also by seeds dispersed by birds. Treat with an herbicide labeled for poison ivy. Or wear protective clothing and disposable gloves and dig it up by hand, discarding with the trash.

WILD VIOLETS



MARIA DRYFHOUT/SHUTTERSTOCK

wild violets (*Viola sororia*), They even grow contentedly beneath black walnut trees. Although they don't spread by underground root structures, wild violets do freely self-seed to the point of behaving as invasive plants in the lawn. In that case, remove by hand or spot spray with broadleaf herbicide.

PLANTAIN



BYSTROV/SHUTTERSTOCK

It often shows up in neglected lawns, usually in shady, moist areas. The good news is, plantain (*Plantago major*) is easy to dig up with a trowel or dandelion weeder.

Tip: It's easiest to pull weeds when the soil is moist.

(<https://www.almanac.com/content/common-garden-weeds>)