

Lawn Care

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SUBDUING WESTERN WEEDS

ON THE West Coast where winters do not freeze the ground for prolonged periods and the heavy snow blanket is confined to high altitudes, lawn weeds make their presence felt the year 'round.

In most of the Pacific area there are two distinct classes of weeds, namely those active in winter or summer.

Winter weeds consist chiefly of native wild grasses like Wild Oats, Barleys, and Bromes. Seeds of these plants are sown thickly by nature in many soils. Their appearance is almost inevitable unless they are kept down by a heavy sod or by close mowing.



Wild grasses begin growth in late fall with the coming of the rains. They are the same grasses that turn the browned hills and fields a nice green for the winter months. They're annuals with a short but fast life.

They show up especially in new lawns planted in late fall, winter or early spring. Because of their rapid growth they may take over a new lawn area and hold back the desirable grasses.

To pull out these wild grasses is a waste of time. It makes holes in the lawn and sores on the fingers. Roots of these weeds are not important anyway. They die within the year.



Most broad leaved weeds like this robust Filaree can be easily killed by modern weed controls without harming the lawn.

This is not Clover but Oxalis, immune to the selective chemicals. Fortunately, resistant weeds like this are few. See page 2.

Frequent mowing can diminish the vigor of these wild grasses to such an extent that this is often the only control needed. The mower should be adjusted to cut closely, one of the few times when close mowing of a lawn is beneficial. After the wild grasses subside, high cutting is again recommended.

It is best to use the grass catcher. The crop of harvested foliage will be heavy and may smother the young grass if left on the lawn. With the rank, wild growth cut off, the desirable grass has a chance to grow normally and develop into a good lawn.

An application of weedfree lawn food at some time during this close mowing program will help the new grass spread out. Young grass can be easily burned by fertilizer applications that are not carefully made. It is best to wash lawn food off the young plants with a forceful spray from the hose right after application. Wild grasses cause little trouble in established lawns.

Summer Weeds include broad-leaved varieties such as Dandelions and Plantains or grasses such as Crabgrass and Bermuda.

Contrary to the general impression there are only about a dozen species of broad-leaved weeds that are common in lawns. In the western states the new chemical weed controls eliminate all but one or two. So there is no longer much excuse for having a weedy lawn.

Ranking first and second in frequency of occurrence are Dandelion and Plantain. Both are very susceptible to chemical control and easily eliminated. Other lawn weeds controlled the easy way are Wild Morning Glory, Bur Clover and Yellow Trefoil, Filaree, Wild Onion, Speedwell, Pennywort and Daisy.

Oxalis is a frequent visitor in California and Oregon lawns and one that

is immune to chemicals. This weed looks a good bit like Clover, but is not botanically related. Oxalis is a species of Wood Sorrel.

One variety is green, another is purplish in coloring and this one is sometimes mistakenly called red clover. Both varieties of Oxalis are perennials and may be found in the same lawn.

Unlike most common lawn weeds, Oxalis is seldom introduced in manures. Neither is it found in even the cheapest lawn seed mixtures. It is more likely to be imported in topsoil. Nature has endowed Oxalis with a unique method of dispersing seeds. When ripe, the pods literally explode, shooting the seeds to a distance of two or three feet.

It appears most often in areas where grass is thin from wear, insect damage or malnutrition and is seldom troublesome in healthy lawns on good soil.

Young plants go unnoticed because the cloverlike leaves are tiny and folded inconspicuously. Unmolested, they develop seeds to further reinfest the soil.

No one has yet presented conclusive evidence of chemical control that is practical. Some gardeners report success from applications of lime and heavy fertilizing. It seems probable, however, that such treatment is simply making it possible for the previously starved grass to reclaim the area. It indicates that if the lawn had been adequately fertilized in the first place, Oxalis would not have obtained a foothold.

"My two pet Muscovy ducks completely eliminated Oxalis. They also control snails, slugs, pill bugs and many other pests. There are very few of some 200 varieties of desired plants in the yard which they harm."—Glen-dale, Calif.

Chickweed is well known in the Northwest, particularly the perennial variety Mouse-ear Chickweed.

This pest is often introduced in manures used in soil preparation or as a topdressing. It presents a good argument in favor of applying only a clean, weedfree lawn food to nourish grass.

Chickweed is a vigorous grower in cool, moist weather. At such times chemical control has little effect so applications are better made in early summer or early fall. Repeat treatments are apt to be required as some plants will escape the first time. Then, too, Chickweed is such a prolific seeder that new plants may develop for a while from seeds long buried.

Crabgrass. There are two summer, grass type lawn weeds that deserve particular attention. These are Bermuda Grass and Crabgrass. They have several traits in common, most notably their sneaky manner of infiltration.

Crabgrass has the wider range and therefore is better known. It also answers to such local names as Finger Grass, Wire Grass and Water Grass.

In its early stages Crabgrass looks like any grass and the inexperienced eye does not detect its presence until it starts spreading, getting coarse and wiry. When it begins to form seed heads it is better to forget about hand pulling and concentrate on prevention of seeding. Being annual, the plants will die within the year but the seeds are deposited to sprout and make more plants next year or even ten years hence.

Mowing alone will not prevent seeding. Some of the heads will develop flat against the ground to escape mowing. Any such prostrate stems should be raked up so they can be cut. A stiff-toothed garden rake is more effective than a flexible leaf broom.

Catch the clippings so the seed spikes will not be spread over the lawn. Re-

peat as necessary to prevent maturing of seeds.

The chemical control of Crabgrass has long been under investigation by research men. Almost every year new controls are marketed with claims for selectively eliminating Crabgrass. Some users report success, others failure. It is not unreasonable to hope that one day a safe and practical means of chemical control will be devised.

Meanwhile it seems prudent to try any new-found products on small test areas before treating the whole lawn.

Bermuda Grass. In southern California and in the interior valleys, Bermuda or Devil Grass is a permanent resident. It is a native of the subtropics and in its own domain makes a satisfactory summer lawn. Nevertheless it is considered a weed by most homeowners because it is only a fair-weather friend. In the fall it plays dead, turning an ugly brown, remaining that way all winter. When the weather gets warm enough it revives. In dormancy brown patches of it are easily spotted among the greener growth of lawns.

Bermuda Grass is not killed by selective chemicals. It must be hand pulled piece by piece at the first sign. Vigilance of this sort has kept it out of lawns even in localities where it is most abundant. It can not be crowded out by healthy grass the way many lawn weeds can. However, healthy grass growing in a thick stand slows it up and helps one to keep ahead of it.

Infested lawns should be renovated by hand rakes or power machines, preferably in the fall or in the spring before Bermuda growth gets fully underway. Thin out the patches and scalp them close. Then apply a good nourishing lawn food and some perennial, long lasting turf grasses.

Clover in Lawns: Friend or Enemy?



The growth of clover is an interesting phenomenon of nature. Farmers know that some years it grows more abundantly than others. For reasons hard to explain it disappears in some years and reappears later without reseeding.

About the same situation exists in the type of clover found in many lawns. Sometimes this clover is seeded by the owner, but often it is strictly volunteer. Its source seems a mystery. The explanation is that some clover seeds have an extremely hard, impermeable seed coat. Such seeds may resist germination or decay for 25 or even 50 years.

Even in a closely cut lawn, clover is apt to bloom and produce seeds. These fall to the ground and some eventually start new plants to continue the cycle.

Advantages of clover in a lawn lie in its prolific top growth and extensive root system. It is somewhat more drouth resistant than grasses so it usually stays green longer. As there is some spreading, almost vining growth close to the ground, clover may help the lawn present more of a green cover right after mowing. Even if the plant dies the roots add valuable humus to the soil. Clover takes nitrogen from the air but little more than is needed for its own growth.

One disadvantage of clover is that it is not a grass so its vegetation is of a different texture. Another is that most lawn lovers object to the white blos-

soms in mid-summer. Actually this is no longer a valid objection. Some of the newer controls for broad-leaved weeds are formulated so they do not permanently injure clover plants. They simply inhibit the blossoming tendency, thus eliminating one objection to clover.

If desired, weed controls may be used to practically eliminate clover. This requires applications at 3 to 4 week intervals through the summer and early fall. One or two treatments per year will have no effect except to reduce blossoming.

Bur Clover. The name of this common lawn weed is misleading for it is not a true clover. It is an annual medic the same as Yellow Trefoil. Both of these lawn pests can be eliminated with the proper weed controls.

Lawn Care Bulletins

Your lawn has been through a rugged winter. Now it is going into a long growing season. Its beauty and utility in the months ahead will depend greatly on how you treat it—how you satisfy its appetite, quench its thirst, and cut it.

LAWN CARE will continue bringing you timely reminders on what to do and when. Everyone with a lawn to build or care for should have the complete set of bulletins, comprising the best lawn references known. Available in loose-leaf ring binder for one dollar or in a heavy paper binding for only twenty-five cents.



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