

All Those Weeds!

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“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder!” This is quite true when it comes to weeds, as a plant that is “out of place” can influence greatly how we react to it.

Most weed scientists (yes, there is such a specialty in agriculture) agree that weed seed production and seed dormancy are of paramount importance. We will come back to that thought later. The ability for weed seeds to survive in the soil until conditions are favorable for germination (seed dormancy) is a major concern in agronomic weed control. Let’s extend that thought a bit further by including garden and small acreages.

There are some considerations that you may need to address before you decide to take action on weeds. Let’s start with your level of acceptance for a plant that is not preferred for a certain area. Can you tolerate a few dandelions in the lawn or garden? What about the idea that the plant can be harmful to pets, livestock or humans? You might need to consider how prevalent the weedy plant is. A few pigweed (*Amaranthus retroflexus*) may be one thing, while many leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*) may be quite another.

Additional thoughts may include the area involved. To some, a small garden or lawn area could be just as big of concern as a pasture or rangelands. Regardless, weeds are great at not discriminating based on size of a plot of land.

A more difficult issue to deal with (but no less important) is whether the plants you are investigating have annual or perennial life-cycles. All annual plants live just one year, whereas perennials live several years or indefinitely. Annuals are notorious for prolific and early seed production. Flowering and subsequent seed production is their sole source of reproduction. The soil can be a major reservoir of seed for years (remember that we discussed this issue earlier in the article).

It will be difficult to know whether you have a perennial or annuals plant unless you can see the rooting structure. Perennial plants can reproduce both by seed and vegetative or underground structures (like rhizomes, runners, etc.). Be vigilant in not introducing weed seed to your growing area. Try purchasing certified weed-free seed (turf or wildflower seed), weed-free potting mixes (composted or not), and weed-free straw for gardens. Also, when feeding or bedding large and small animals, think of hay or alfalfa sources that are weed seed free.

Basic weed control advice, regardless of the situation (garden plot, lawn/turf or small acreage) is competition—it’s an excellent way to suppress or prevent weeds. Good fertility is important for the desired plant(s). Soil disturbances are not desirable and can expose seeds in the soil-bank to conditions ideal for germination. Avoid bare or exposed ground by establishing a desired cover-crop or use wood mulch. These procedures will help prevent soil erosion and keep undesired plants at bay. Proper aeration or mulching promotes good growing conditions for your desired plants and aids in your ability to prevent un-healthy pests or disease. And, least we should forget, the adage of “right place, right plant.” This saying might be the most important thing to remember in your gardening or landscaping decisions.

Additional weed or garden questions? Contact the CSU Extension Office in Larimer County at 970-498-6000 or email the Larimer County Master Gardeners at larimermg@gmail.com. For information on gardening and small acreage management, visit extension.colostate.edu.

Estes Valley Community Garden Board thanks Master Gardener Patrick Miller for providing this overview of weed control considerations.