

# Dealing with Weeds in Your Vegetable Garden



Weeds are plants growing where you don't want them or "plants out of place." They compete with garden plants for water and nutrients and may harbor insect and disease pests. Controlling weed growth is a key to success in the vegetable garden.

Start early, as soon as weeds appear. Whenever bare soil is exposed, weed seeds stored in the soil are likely to germinate and fill that space. It's especially important to prevent weeds from producing and spreading seeds.



- Hand-pull weeds when they are young and tender. Mature weeds extract large quantities of moisture and nutrients from the soil. Hand-pull the vigorous weeds that grow through organic mulches.
- Look for low-cost weeding tools at thrift stores, dollar stores, and garage sales.



- Slice weeds off at ground level using a long-handled hoe with a sharp edge. Use a heavy hoe, like a stirrup hoe or grubbing hoe, to dig out perennial weeds or weeds with large taproots, like dandelions. The less you disturb the soil, the fewer weed seeds you'll bring to the surface where they can germinate.

- Mow around your garden to prevent the spread of weeds.
  - Grass clippings should be allowed to dry before you pile them around plants.
  - Do not use any grass clippings that have been treated with an herbicide.



- Synthetic mulches come in many varieties. Black plastic mulch warms the soil for earlier, higher yields of warm-season crops. It cannot be re-used a second season. Landscape fabric warms the soil and allows water and air into the soil, and it can be re-used. Cut holes in synthetic mulches with scissors or a razor to plant seeds or transplants.



Canada thistle  
(*Cirsium arvense*)



Creeping Charlie  
(*Glechoma hederacea*)

- Difficult perennial weeds like quackgrass, Canada thistle, and creeping charlie can be weakened and killed by continually cutting off top growth and smothering with mulch.



- Spread organic mulches around your crops to prevent weed growth, moderate soil temperature, conserve soil moisture, and add organic matter to the soil when they rot. They also keep the soil loose, so that weeds are easier to pull by hand. Examples: 2 to 4 inches of grass clippings or tree leaves saved over the winter, finished compost, and newspaper or cardboard covered with straw or shredded leaves.



### Learn more:

Web pages- [go.umd.edu/FoodGardening](http://go.umd.edu/FoodGardening)  
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