

in the garden

BY STEPHEN AND KRISTIN PATEGAS

Weeds In The Garden



Kristin and Stephen Pategas

Say it isn't so! Our garden has weeds! But it would be a pretty sad garden that was so low in nutrients that a weed wouldn't grow. What does it take for an unwanted intruder to take hold? For weeds that spread by seed it takes three conditions for germination: organic matter, light and moisture. Hence a weed is employed.

As our summer rains return and we irrigate more frequently, it is guaranteed we will have weeds. How many and how big they get depends upon the design and maintenance of your garden and most importantly, your mindset.

✂ Do not irrigate more than is needed. Less frequent and longer periods are better than more frequent for shorter lengths. This builds deeper root systems, allows plants to go longer without water and reduces moisture at the soil line where seeds reside.

✂ Proper plant spacing and trimming should allow groundcovers and low shrubs to knit together so they shade the ground. Lower light levels on the soil underneath them retards weed seed germination.

✂ Maintain a two to three inch layer of organic mulch over all of the exposed soil. If you can see bare soil (the organic matter), expect to see seeds there the next time you look.

Of course, in spite of our best intentions there will still be some weeds. We take the "a little bit now is better that a whole lot later" approach to weeding. When we see one or more we pull them. We don't wait for some future date with



A tight groundcover such as dwarf Asian jasmine/Trachelospermum asiaticum shades out many seeds.

There are woodsorrels other than this Cuban purple woodsorrel/Oxalis intermedia with bulbs.



an invasion of hundreds. Once weeds mature and set seeds they send out thousands of recruits that can lay dormant for years.

We also make sure to get the root out so we always have a tool to loosen the soil. Our weeding weapon of choice is the Soil Knife in a sheath hanging from our belt (4750 & 4750S; 800-543-8955/ www.amleo.com). For cracks and crevices in walkways and driveways the Crack Weeder (EE310) is useful. There is even a telescoping handle version so you can stand upright as you weed (PD405; 800-871-8158 or www.leevalley.com). In tight places and for weeding around prickly plants our hemostats with teeth (normally used in operating rooms as clamps) are indispensable. We found ours locally at Skycraft on Fairbanks, just east of I-4.

Know thy enemy. Be acquainted with their root systems and how they spread and regenerate. If they are the clover leaf-like woodsorrel/Oxalis with the lavender blooms, they have bulbs that need to be removed. Don't just tug on the breakaway stems. There are some weeds that fall into the category of invasive plants because they are super survivors. That topic is worthy of another column.

The weed's only job is to thrive. Once employed in the garden it spreads and roots or flowers. Then the recruits head off to sprout. So deprive it of one or more of the three conditions it needs and send it to the unemployment line. ✂

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