

Two weeks ago I wrote about the many chores that need to be accomplished in the landscape before winter arrives. One of those tasks is to treat for perennial broadleaf weeds in turf grass. Such weeds include dandelions, white clover, black medic, ground ivy, wild violet and the list goes on. The weapon of choice is generally 2 4-D. Using this particular herbicide in the fall for perennial broadleaf weed control yields the best results. Perennial weeds are preparing for dormancy, and plants' energies are directed to the roots. When an herbicide is applied in the fall, the toxic material translocates to the weed's roots, and through the winter months, the weed dies. Furthermore, an herbicide such as 2 4-D applied in the fall causes less stress on other desirable perennial plants which are less sensitive to the drift of volatile fumes from this herbicide compared with when one sprays in the spring.

This past weekend, Rita and I treated our lawn with 2 4-D, and after we finished, I began thinking, "Why are we so obsessed to have a weed-free lawn?" After all, lawns are generally monocultures — defined as an eco-system of one species. The fact is, monocultures are unbalanced and more vulnerable to risk. Such eco-systems are highly prone to disease, insect pests, drought, and other perils. By contrast, a natural eco-system composed of a large number of species, including weeds, diversifies risk.

Furthermore, such a monoculture demands fertilizers, herbicides, and insecticides, all of which are expensive and create still more work. Fertilizers promote fast growth, requiring more mowing and more watering. Why do we subject ourselves to such toil and anxiety?

My conclusion is most gardeners hate weeds. I know I do, and here are my top four reasons.

1. **Weeds generally grow where they are not wanted. They take up valuable garden space.**
2. **Weeds compete for the same resources. They greedily consume valuable water and nutrients needed by desirable plants.**
3. **Weeds often harbor harmful undesirables such as insect pests, or they often have other unwelcome characteristics like thorns, stickers and thistles.**
4. **Weeds are prolific. Most produce countless seeds and reproduce readily.**

Although it's obvious that I am definitely opposed to weeds, I realize weeds do provide some value.

1. **Weeds are known to break up soil compaction and prevent erosion.**
2. **As weeds continually grow and die, they build up organic matter in the soil.**
3. **Weeds found growing in an area can help to diagnose the nutrient profile of the existing soil.**
4. **Weeds provide food for soil microbes.**

Having now listed some useful traits of weeds, perhaps I should change my opinion and start developing a fondness for weeds. H-m-m-m —let me think about that for a moment. Nope! I still hate weeds! I do, however, accept them as a part of the natural order.

After all, as a child, I remember from Sunday school learning about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis God says to Adam, "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you."

Let's face it. Weeds are a way of life. There is no rule that states you must like them; nor is there one that says you must hate them. What you should do is simply accept them. How to deal with them is totally up to you.