

Weed Prevention

By: Melinda Sperl

Weed control is like preventing the fire before it starts. Most weeds are spread by the wind, mulch, soil or birds over the ground. The majority of weed control products sold are for post emergent weeds, after they are already grown. But controlling them before they sprout is the best way to control them.

Using a pre-emergent herbicide in early spring and late fall will kill most weed seeds before they germinate. This will not kill existing weeds and that can discourage a lot of people who want instant results. Over time though, this will eliminate the need for other measures.

Topical, post emergent, weed treatments like Round Up are very useful for existing weeds but even if you kill that particular weed it may have already spread its seeds around the yard. If you apply a pre-emergent herbicide, those seeds will not germinate the following year. It can be a hard concept to follow but the number one thing I am asked how a professionally landscaped yard is kept weed-free, the secret is pre-emergent herbicides.

Another consideration is all seeds need sunlight to germinate, even weed seeds. Weed Fabric is an option but covering the ground will not discourage weed growth since only surface seeds grow. The downside to weed fabric is that it retards water absorption from above and then prevents evaporation and mold is very often the result. Mulch is a better option as it covers the weed seeds keeping out light and discouraging new seeds from germinating.

Nutgrass is a whole problem in itself. It resembles grass and has an actual nut about a foot underground. If you pull it out it is thought to divide like a bulb. Nutgrass (nutsedge) will come through any weed fabric, rock or mulch, so treatment for this will have to be specific to the weed such as Sedge Hammer or Image. It may take a couple of weeks to die so try to hold off pulling before it can work to the root. You also need leaf blades to be at least 4 inches long before you spray them. It's hard to hold off that long, but it is worth it. Unfortunately typical products like Round-Up will not even damage this weed.

Prevention is key, but worth it in the long run. Identification of your weeds isn't always important as the weed in your yard may be the perfect plant in your neighbor's yard. But, nutgrass is a weed in everyone's yard!

Happy Gardening!

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