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Taming Weeds

Their phenomenal growth rates and ability to survive in hostile environments have won some plants the unflattering designation of 'weed'. These maligned plants have a common trait: In their ideal environment, they almost always outgrow the fruits, vegetables, flowers and grasses we wish to cultivate. The question is how can you control weeds without destroying treasured plants or harming the environment?

Fire – Flamethrowers and handheld Butane or propane torches are an effective, non-chemical method of controlling weeds. When intense heat is applied to plants, they burst the cell walls, killing the plant or destroying a portion of it. Be sure to remove the roots as well to avoid regrowth.

Lawn-mowing – Avoid mowing too low. Short grass offers less competition for weeds and also dries out faster in hot weather.

Soil Improvement – Healthy soil gives your grass a fighting chance. Supplement your yard with compost, well-aged manure, and fish fertilizer. Heavy, infrequent watering will encourage your grass to develop deep roots. Adding lime and a nitrogen-rich fertilizer will create unfavourable conditions for weeds such as clover.

Aeration – Use a handheld or motorized aerator to increase airflow and reduce soil compaction, making it less favourable for some weeds.

Tools – One of the most effective weed control methods is simply to dig them up. You will find tools with such names as the "Claw", "The Ideal Weeder", and the "Gooseneck Weeder". Fill in holes left after removing weeds with soil and sow fresh grass seed.

Mulch – A layer of horticultural fabric, bark chips, cocoa husks and other types of mulch will block out sunlight from weed seeds and seedlings. Mulch will also help the soil retain moisture reducing the need for watering.

Chemical Herbicides & Alternative Herbicides – Check with a qualified horticulturalist for information on the proper type of herbicide for your needs. Many herbicides can be harmful to people, pets and the environment. Applying the product at the right time of year and in the right quantity will help you maximize its effectiveness.

Beneficial weeds – As the old saying goes: "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em!" With the wind blowing in seeds from neighbouring properties, it won't be possible to permanently eradicate weeds from your lawn and garden. Fortunately, weeds have their benefits. Clover, for example, will add nitrogen to the soil. Yarrow also has medicinal properties, and if left uncut will produce attractive white flowers. Dandelion has medicinal properties as a blood purifier and diuretic.

Weeds can spread their seeds and outgrow many cultivated and indigenous species so your efforts to control weeds will not only make your lawn and garden look better, but also your neighbours and local farmers will thank you.

