

Out in the Garden

Rockport Garden Club, June 2020



Garden Diary: Weeds, Nature's Problem Solver

Weeds. The word can conjure up dread, fear, aggravation and despair. We spend hours hoeing, digging, pulling, spraying and mulching in a never-ending fight to eradicate these invaders. Goutweed is my personal nemesis and will evoke absolute panic in me. Whenever I see it in my garden, or anyone else's for that matter, I am immediately on high alert and tell myself, "the enemy is in the camp; quick grab your weapons and attack!"

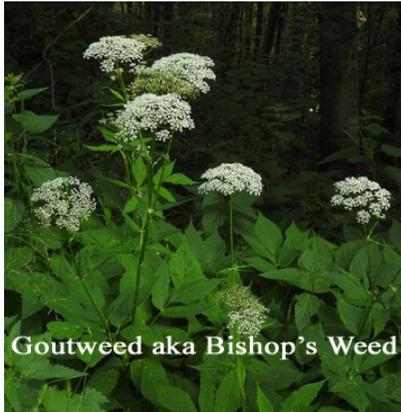
So, what exactly are weeds and why do we get them? Well, they are nature's problem solvers.

Weeds can tell a gardener a lot about the health and condition of their soil. In Ehrenfried E. Pfeiffer's book, "Weeds and What They Tell Us," he writes, "Weeds represent human beings' failure to master the soil, and they grow abundantly where people have made mistakes – they simply indicate our errors and nature's corrections."

Healthy soil is key to both happy, healthy plants and weed control; and good garden preparation and maintenance are essential.

When putting in a new garden be diligent about making sure you've dug out or smothered any existing weeds or you will be fighting them for months perhaps years to come.

Smothering weeds can be accomplished a number of ways. Landscape cloth will work in the short term but will cause problems down the road. See [6 Reasons Why Landscape Fabric is a Bad Idea](#) Black plastic is good for large areas but should only be used to smother out weeds over the course of a season and then be removed. Card-



Goutweed aka Bishop's Weed



board and newsprint are good weed barriers because they are readily available, inexpensive and will usually break down within one or two seasons.

Deep tilling is never a good idea. It may seem like you are killing grass and weeds but in fact you are digging up dormant seeds that will sprout as soon as they see the light. I once tilled a large field in preparation for wildflowers. Unfortunately, the tilling had unearthed decades of dormant seeds and instead of beautiful wildflowers I had a field full of Lamb's Quarters, an excellent edible weed, but not the wildflowers I wanted. I was not happy. Tilling also damages the natural bacteria in the soil thus weakening the health of your garden which, means more weeds.

If you are adding soil or compost, to a new garden or an established one, make sure both are good quality. If compost has not been turned properly weed seeds will remain viable and very happily grow in your new garden. Never use hay to mulch! You will have every weed seed that grew in the field where the hay was cut. Use straw instead. It's more expensive but will do the job and eventually break down adding organic matter to your garden.

Arranging plants closer together will also help in the fight against weeds as the shade from the plants will prevent any weeds from taking a firm hold. Remember that nature doesn't like naked soil and weeds will happily clothe any bare areas – that is their job after all.

Weeds give us valuable information so we need to listen. Check out this article in the Farmers Almanac about what a particular weed is telling you about your soil. Remember the lambs quarter in my field? That indicated that the soil was rich and high in nitrogen. [Weeds as Indicator Plants, What Common Weeds Can Tell You About Your Soil](#)

Alas, even with proper preparation weeds, like an unwanted relative, will find their way into our gardens and once there make themselves at home. They have had centuries to perfect themselves and let's face it, nature is on their side so a keen eye and diligent maintenance is a must for a weed free garden. Good luck and happy weeding.

—Submitted by Lizzy Fotouhi



Lamb's Quarter



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The Garden Cart: Indian Pink

In summer, *Spiegelia* is such a showstopper in my garden that people knock on the door to ask about it. This plant has trumpet shaped, vivid red flowers on a stiff stem. Each flower is yellow inside and flares at the top to form a five pointed lobe (a yellow star) which makes it one of the best and most striking wildflowers of North America.

Although it is not native to New England, it grows well here once established. It exceeded expectations in the trials at the Chicago Botanical Garden on the shore of Lake Michigan and made its list of top ten perennial standouts. The plants start out small, but steadily become 1 to 2 feet wide clumps. The plants are adaptable to various light levels, but don't like hot sun. Hummingbirds will frequent it for nectar.



Photo: North Creek Nurseries

Attributes:

Height: 1 to 2 feet
Spread: .5 to 1.5 feet
Hardiness Zone: 4-8
Bloom: 2 1/2 inch long
Bloom time: early to late summer
Exposure: part shade to part sun
Soil Moisture: average to moist, well drained
Maintenance: Low
Attracts: Hummingbirds
Eco-region: Southeast US as far west as Texas
Tolerates: Drought

—Patty Hock

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

Garden Reminders:

What to do in your Garden
this Month

What's Happening

Virtual Member Meeting

Monday, June 1st

12:30 Open, 1:00 PM Presentation

Speaker: Bill Hamilton

*'The Life Cycle of Bees and
Their Importance as Pollinators'*

Check your email.

Weeding Tuesdays

at the Millbrook Meadow

Come help the Invasive Plants Team and Millbrook Meadow Volunteers keep this lovely public space spiffy! 10AM—12 PM
Contact: laura.hallowell37@gmail.com
Rain Date: Wednesday

Scholarship Award Ceremony

June 5th

At Rockport High School Graduation

These Events are cancelled:

Gardening Workshop@ Long Hill

Senior Housing Flower Arranging

Arts & Flowers (possibly Aug.)

On this June day the buds in my garden are almost as enchanting as the open flowers. Things in bud bring, in the heat of a June noontide, the recollection of the loveliest days of the year - those days of May when all is suggested, nothing yet fulfilled.

- Francis King