



News Release

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CONTROLLING WEEDS IN THE GARDEN

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Hot dry weather is bringing gardeners into the nursery with questions about weed control in their vegetable gardens. It seems some of the only living things on this planet that like three-digit temperatures are weeds! Here are a few ideas to keep you from being overwhelmed by one of gardening's least popular chores:

A three-inch layer of organic mulch such as straw or grass clippings will keep moisture from evaporating and hinder germination of weed seeds. Mulch will also add organic matter to your soil which will produce a better crop for the next season. If you use grass clippings or straw make sure an herbicide has not been used, as it can damage garden plants. Your mulch material should be weed seed free. Examples of materials for mulching include straw, leaves, newspaper and grass clippings. Do not use hay.

Close Spacing of plants can be a big help because it shades the soil so weeds will not be able to germinate. Adding new plants to an area that will be harvested soon will help to use all available space.

Cultivation involves tilling scraping or raking the soil to destroy young weeds. Be sure to Cultivate at or below the soil surface to avoid bringing more weed seeds to the soil surface and damaging soil structure. Hoeing is very helpful and can reduce weeds in large areas.

Cover crops can be planted after harvest and turned over into the soil. This will help reduce weeds and improve soil structure and there are many species from which to choose.

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Solarization is a technique by which clear plastic is placed on top of the soil to raise the soil temperature to kill weed seeds, as well as other disease causing organisms and nematodes. Periods of high temperature such as what we have been experiencing recently are ideal conditions for solarization. In general, 4 to 6 weeks of soil heating during the warmest time of the year is sufficient to control most soil pests. In some cases, such as in cooler, windier, or cloudier locations, or if there are pests that are harder to control, it may be necessary to leave the plastic in place 6 to 8 weeks.

Black plastic mulch is a very effective deterrent to annual and perennial weeds. It will raise the temperature of the soil around 10 F during certain times of the day. Black plastic mulch lasts for a year or two, then will degrade to the point where it will need to be thrown out.

Herbicides can be a great time saver if used properly. Herbicides must be used according to label directions. Improper use of herbicides can hinder plant growth and damage existing garden plants.

Pulling weeds by hand may be necessary for established perennial weeds with a taproot. Pulling when the soil is moist after a rain is most successful. The alternative is to avoid the establishment of perennial weeds.

Mike Bauer is the Horticulturist for Moose Valley Farms, a full-service garden center located on Hwy 95 in Naples at mile marker 495. Please feel free to call us at 267-5108 or stop in if you have any questions.