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Sneaky Weeds

By Joye Gephart and Susan Corey-McAlpine
UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County

“A weed is a plant that has mastered every survival skill except for learning how to grow in rows.” - *Doug Larson*

Admirable? Without a doubt: weeds outcompete the seedlings of desirable species for soil moisture, crowd out native plants, change the structure of the soil, alter water flows, and reduce the food and shelter available for wildlife. They spread by shooting their seeds, hitching a ride on a mower, or hiding in arid soil for years. Weeds are the ultimate survivors.

Already familiar with field invasives like Scotch broom or yellow starthistle? Today we will speak to those weeds which sneak into lawn, ground cover, or ornamentals, initially establishing themselves close to the ground. A photo gallery of the weeds discussed can be found at http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/weeds_all.html.

Dallisgrass (*Paspalum dilatatum*)

This weed invades your lawn. Its blades are ¼ to ½ inches wide and grow from a center with short nodes so it appears to be growing in concentric circles. It likes wet conditions, thrives when the lawn is mown short - receiving lots of sunlight - and loves nitrogen fertilizers. Flower spikelets contain rows of egg-shaped seeds. Once established, it resists frost and drought. Early recognition and prevention are best practices: mow lawns at the highest recommended setting; fertilize correctly; prevent soggy soil; remove when small, before seed heads emerge.

Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*)

Most gardeners know the name and reputation of this alternative turf, which was hybridized for greater durability. Seeds in soil can still sprout after two years; withstands drought but prefers moist soil; punctures weed-blocking cloths; grows above (stolons) and below (rhizomes) ground. It's not easily controlled so prevention is a must. If withholding water is possible, this helps prevent the stolons and rhizomes from growing; try hand-pulling, heavy mulching, or solarizing the soil.

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Yellow nutsedge (*Cyperus esculentus*)

Another lover of wet conditions and sunshine, nutsedge resembles grass at first glance. But it's lighter in color, has triangular stalks, and will grow faster than lawn grasses. A perennial that spreads through underground tubers attached to rhizomes, yellow nutsedge can grow three feet tall and is common throughout California. Early detection and prevention are key: allowing the lawn or flowerbed to dry out between waterings, hand-pulling to prevent tubers from growing, and reseeding with desirable grasses to shade it out will discourage this weed. Although the tubers are edible (yellow nutsedge is a crop elsewhere in the world), eating tubers while weeding is not the way to eradicate this plant!

Green Kyllinga (*Kyllinga brevifolia*)

Another sedge, kyllinga is similar to nutsedge but with thicker rhizomes without tubers. It spreads fast through its tough rhizomes as well as its numerous seeds on stalks. Mow it too closely and the plant will multiply seed stalks at a shorter length. It crowds out desirable lawn or ground covers and, again, prevention and early detection are key. Try mowing desirable lawn or growing your ornamentals to a height that shades out the seeds, hand pulling before rhizomes set new plants, and letting lawns or beds dry out between waterings.

Little Bittercress (*Cardamine oligosperma*)

If you have ever been weeding and had seeds explode in your face, it's probably this culprit. With its small white flowers, this broadleaf plant is considered desirable in a natural setting but not in your garden. Learn to recognize it as a tiny plant and hand pull to prevent its explosive power. Forming a rosette branching from the soil along stems, leaves are round or kidney shaped; flower stalks, with tiny white flowers, are up to 12-inches tall. Pull before the flowers become dried tubes of seeds to prevent them bursting on your scene, starting new plants many yards away!

Herbicides, if used, should be carefully chosen to target specific weeds, applied according to package instructions, and with surrounding ornamentals protected from "drift." Avoiding broad-spectrum herbicides protects insect pollinators or insects whose diet includes plant pests such as lady beetles. The wrong herbicide may not eradicate your weed, killing only part of the gene pool, leaving a remainder resistant to that herbicide.

A treasury of Master Gardener articles can be found at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu> under Articles>Archived Articles. Examples are Paula Bertram's WeedSpeak: What Our Weeds are Telling Us, or Barbara Schuchart's They Come - Those Invasive Plants.

Join us for "Permaculture for the Homestead and the Garden" on October 7. Gain an understanding of what permaculture is (and is not), the core design principles and common practices. Government Center Hearing Room, Bldg C. 2850 Fairlane Ct, Placerville.

Next up is "Olives: from Garden to Table" on October 11. Catch live demonstrations and answers to all your questions on growing to curing olives. Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Drive, Cameron Park. Our public education classes are free and held 9am to noon.

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UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at [http://ucanr.edu/master gardener e-news](http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news). You can also find us on Facebook.