



Weed Speak: What Our Weeds are Telling Us
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We spend endless hours and funds trying to eliminate weeds from our gardens. But it's important to understand "the enemy" and to intercept their messages. So here is a list of tell-tale weeds and their communications. If you have no problem with any of these, you are some sort of god among gardeners-- and should be writing these articles!

Numero uno on the list of obnoxious weeds is field bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*). Some people call this wild morning glory. It is found in fields and wild landscapes, and sports a pretty white morning glory like flower. This terrorist can have roots and stems that are over 15 feet deep! So unless you are prepared to detonate a small nuclear device in your backyard, there is no way to completely eradicate it. But, it thrives in heavy compacted clay and its roots take cover under and around rocks and other hardscape. It is telling you that the infested areas have not been loosened, turned over and amended sufficiently. The young plants (learn to recognize the seedlings!) are vulnerable, so cultivate early and often. Try not to leave bits of root behind -- they will sprout readily. The plants that you do want to grow will really appreciate all your hard work. By the way, a weed identification tool can be found at www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/weeds_intro.html.

Next on the wall of shame is oxalis, aka sorrel (*Oxalis corniculata*). Oxalis loves an acid soil. (There is a gorgeous native variety that is found in the deep shade of old grove redwood forests.) The nasty garden oxalis is a shallow-rooted network of small leaves, sporting yellow flowers. Its encouraged by frequent light watering. And it seems to be very common in nurseries. Inspect plants that you buy very carefully for these pesky invaders. If you have a lot of sorrel in some part of the garden, maybe that's where you should try growing some azaleas or blueberries -- which enjoy an acid environment. But, it goes without saying; you must dig out all that oxalis first.

What about dandelions, you query? *Taraxacum officinale* also indicates compacted soil. They have a long taproot -- commonly 6-18 inches) that can extract nutrients and moisture much deeper than your competing plants. If you don't eat your dandelions, the trick to remove them is to grub the dandelions out when they are young, before the taproot has had a chance to grow. Use a long vicious weapon like a screwdriver, hori-hori knife or actual dandelion tool that sort of screws into the ground around the plant to pull it up intact. Dandelions like light to germinate, so thick growths of turf or other ornamentals will discourage them.

Got clover in your lawn? You are so busted! Your lawn is crying out: "Feed Me!" Clover (like all legumes) has their own little nitrogen fixing factories, so it out-competes your turf in a low fertility environment. Aerate your soil, leave the clippings on top and give your lawn a good meal with lots of nitrogen. You'll both be much happier.

What about moss in a lawn? Easy! Too much moisture or poor drainage. Cut back on your watering program. Remember: less often but deep irrigation. Your turf should be wet several inches below the surface when you finish your watering. Then let it dry out a couple of inches below surface before watering again. That will discourage that pesky moss.

Now here is a weed that should make you happy! Purslane (*Portulaca Oleracea*) is a ground hugging spreader with small juicy succulent type leaves. It's saying to you---"Job well done." It tends to thrive in rich, moist, loose soils. This little guy is easy to pull out, and it's edible! One of the UCCE Master Gardeners gave us a recipe for using portulaca. Sauté some onion or garlic in olive oil. Add chopped purslane (the stems and leaves are tender and delicious with a sort of lemony taste) and steam briefly. Or try it sautéed with scrambled eggs for "Huevos con Verdulogas".

Bottom line---weeds flourish because they are tough, adaptable and persistent. If we are not giving our desirable plants the care they need, weeds will move right in and out compete. So, give your garden a fighting chance and listen to what the weeds are trying tell you.

There is no public education Master Gardener class this Saturday, July 12, 2014. UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions at local Farmers Markets and at their office 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 Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.