

WEEDING

A weed is plant that is out of place. There is no scientific definition for a weed. The designation of a weed varies from grower to grower. However, understanding weeds is an important part of maintaining a garden.

IDENTIFICATION

Identifying the weeds in your garden allows you to use different weed management strategies to specific species, making them more effective. For example, if your garden has Japanese Knotweed, which is an invasive species, it is recommended that you not put it in your compost. Weed identification can also save time and energy. If a weed is not particularly harmful or invasive, it may not require additional action. Books, such as Weeds of Northeast (Uva, Neal, and DiTomaso, 1997), can help you to identify weeds.

PREVENTION

- **SITE PREPARATION:** Try to remove any remaining weeds before planting a new crop. Then lay a weed mat below the area's soil. This will help to suppress weed seeds that might be lurking under your growing area. In areas where you are growing perennials, you can cover the area surrounding the base of your plants with mulch, to suffocate weeds.
- **SOIL AND COMPOST APPLICATION:** Ensure that new soil and compost is clean and free of weeds. Compost that was created at high temperatures (105°F or above) is ideal because the high temperatures kill weed seeds.
- **PLANT SELECTION:** Make sure that the species you are planting are not invasive. Invasive species are more likely to spread and will compete for resources with other plants you are trying to grow. They also tend to spread to the wider environment and disrupt ecosystems.
- **CLEAN EQUIPMENT:** Clean tools and reused containers when moving between areas of your garden. This reduces the chance that you will spread weed seeds to new locations in your growing space.



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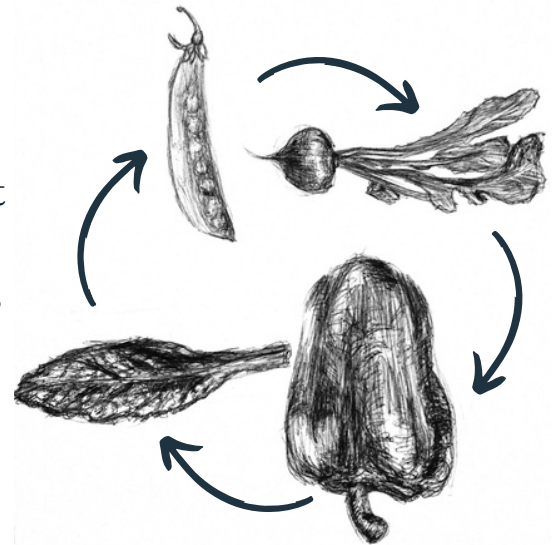


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CULTURAL CONTROLS

- **COVER CROPPING:** Use cover crops, which can outcompete weeds for water, sunlight, and nutrients. As they decay, cover crops also act as an organic mat that smothers weeds, preventing their growth. Some cover crops, such as winter rye, even produce natural herbicides as they break down.
- **CROP ROTATION:** Plant to rotate your crops so that you are growing crops from different scientific families in a given space from season to season. This limits a weed's ability to adapt to a particular plant and cause even greater damage to your crops.
- **OVER-SEEDING:** This involves applying high amounts of a cover crop repeatedly in bare spots of your garden. Over-seeding allows a crop to establish itself and crowd out weeds in that area.



Illustrations by Olivia Golden

WEED MANAGEMENT

- **PREVENT FROM GOING TO SEED:** It is helpful to pull garden weeds before they produce flowers. If you cannot get to the weeds before they flower, it is crucial to pull them before they start to produce mature seeds. This can prevent weeds from spreading and causing greater problems in your garden.
- **HAND-PULL WEEDS WITH EXTENSIVE ROOTS:** While garden tools can disturb weeds, hand-pulling weeds is generally one of the most effective organic methods of weed management for a small plot. When you pull a weed, try to remove the entire plant, including the root system. If part of the root structure is left intact, the plant may regrow.
- **INVASIVE WEED DISPOSAL:** If you realize that a weed in your garden is an invasive species, it is best practice to pull out the entire weed, including the root structure, place it in a sealed container or bag, and dispose of it in the trash. Composting invasive species may allow them to spread in your garden.

Sources: NYC Parks GreenThumb, University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources, Southwest Corridor Park, University of Massachusetts Extension, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Science.