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### **Got weeds? Yep, and so do we...**

August is finally upon us. The kids are headed back to school and the monsoon rains have arrived to cool us off. The desert has come alive with lush, green new growth. In many cases, we welcome this burst of life. We appreciate the bloom on the ocotillo, the freshness of the green on the trees...but when it comes to weeds, what do we do? Yikes! They're everywhere and they're taking over! In this article we're going to help you take on this gardener's adversary. We'll go over the different controls, including mechanical, pre-emergents and post-emergents, both organic and mechanical.

Let's begin by defining the word "**weed**": *A weed is any **undesired** plant that competes for light, moisture and nutrients of desired vegetation.*

That sounds about right. Considering that they seem to be able to sow themselves right where they can be the biggest nuisance, with a stronger, longer root than anything you intentionally planted, and I think we've covered it.

Add to that the fact that weed seeds can actually stay dormant in the soil for 7 years or more until the conditions are ripe for germination. Weed control is best achieved by preventing them from producing new seeds in the first place, which is easier said than done. That's where pre-emergents come in.

Pre-emergent weed controls help to nip those weeds in the bud. Pre-emergents work by laying down a "barrier" (or chemical base) that prevents seeds that have been germinated to pass through and emerge from the ground. This method does not work on weeds that are already growing. If you prefer organic methods, corn gluten meal pre-emergents are available and are very effective. You must re-apply corn gluten after a rain, as it may lose its effectiveness if excessive rains occur. Corn gluten meal will remain effective for up to

6 weeks and is best applied in early January ahead of the winter rains and/or early July ahead of the summer monsoons. There are many conventional (non-organic) pre-emergents to choose from as well. If you choose a pre-emergent, bear in mind that the effects can last up to 6 months from the date of application and you should not try to seed anything in that area during this time.

Once those weeds are up and growing and you've missed the window for using pre-emergents, there is always the tried and true method of hand-pulling the weeds. Some people find it therapeutic but it almost gave *me* carpal tunnel syndrome. When dealing with large areas, hand-weeding can be back-breaking and time-consuming work.

Mechanical controls such as weeders, trowels, or a variety of hoes work well. It is important to cut into the soil 2-4 inches below ground level to prevent them from growing back from the root. One drawback to this method is that perennial variety weeds such as Bermuda grass, Johnson grass, Desert Broom, Burrow Weed, etc. produce a strong enough root system to recover from any amount of hoeing. Nutgrass has a little 'nut' on its root below the soil surface designed to send up a new shoot every time the top of the plant is cut off. Another drawback is that by hoeing the ground you are disturbing other weed seeds that may be present and preparing the perfect bed for them to thrive in, necessitating more weeding. The plus side is that hoeing is quick and easy after a rain when the ground is soft.

If using a hoe isn't for you, then you may choose to turn to organic spray-on chemical controls. Acetic acid is available from online sources, such as Peaceful Valley Farm Supply in California. Acetic acid is very caustic and non-selective. Sprayed on, it will burn any plant it comes in contact with, so you must be careful to apply only to the weeds you want to be rid of. It must be re-applied after rain. This is especially effective on perennial weeds, but may take several applications to completely remove all chance of re-growth.

BurnOut from St. Gabriel Organics contains lemon juice, vinegar, clove oil and other ingredients. This product is similar to acetic acid in that it is a non-selective herbicide and will burn all plants it comes in contact with. These types are best used in areas such as gravel paths or rockscapes, rather than garden beds. Again, several applications may be necessary. Both acetic acid and BurnOut are safe to use in yards where children and animals are active, but wait until it dries before letting anyone out to play.

Perhaps you want to kill those weeds off with chemical warfare. Glyphosate, better known as Round-Up, is available under many different brand names from Killzall to Remuda among others. Different concentrations are available, depending on the manufacturer. Check the labels. Some brands come in the 7-17% concentration range, while others are available in concentrations as high as 43-48%. The higher the concentration, the more effective the product will be. The higher concentrations also increase the chances of chemically burning the plant, so read label directions thoroughly and apply accordingly. Glyphosate is also a non-selective herbicide, so be careful where you spray it.

Selective systemic (*systemic herbicides are absorbed through the foliage of the plant down to the roots*) herbicide sprays, such as 2-4-D, specifically target broadleaf weeds and not grasses, making them a good choice for lawns, pastures, etc. They are usually mixed with water and then applied. Selective systemic herbicides can also cause damage to other broadleaf plants such as shrubs or trees, and careful application is necessary when used around landscape plants.

‘Weed and Feed’ lawn products also target broadleaf weeds in lawns. Here in Arizona, these should be used with caution, as most cannot be used when temperatures rise above 85-90 degrees without causing chemical and fertilizer burn. Another drawback to this type of treatment is that they can and will cause damage to and/or kill trees and shrubs growing in and immediately around the lawn area.

Weeds should be treated when they are actively growing and between 1-3 inches tall and, if possible, within three days of the last rainfall. The above-mentioned chemicals may not be as effective if the weed is too tall, stressed from lack of water, or if the temperatures are above 100 degrees when applying.

If you are unsure as to which method is the best choice for your yard or landscape, stop by the nursery and we’ll help you find the right one. In the meantime, enjoy the rain and all that it brings!

~Tony Sarah, Horticulturist