

# Home Grounds Fact Sheet

## Weed Control in Landscape Plantings

Beautiful, weed-free landscape and flower plantings give you a feeling of satisfaction.

There are several ways you can achieve this goal, depending on your energy, budget and personal taste.

### POST PLANTING

#### Weed Control by Hand:

This method is the oldest form of weed control and is still quite practical for use on small properties. No equipment other than a hoe or hand trowel is needed and the method, although time-consuming, is temporarily effective. If hand weeding is the method to be used, cut the weeds near the soil surface while they are still small (under 2"). Cultivating into the soil surface turns up new weed seeds and may disturb the roots of desirable plants. Be sure to discard weeds after pulling; many will regrow if left on the soil surface.

#### Cultural Weed Control:

Cultural methods are the best way of controlling weeds around most homes. They are generally designed to be preventative rather than eliminating large weeds in an already weedy area. Cultural methods may require a good deal of labor initially, but the process need not be repeated as often as with hand weeding. The cost is usually quite reasonable. Three examples of cultural control are: the use of organic and inorganic mulches, metal or plastic edging materials and establishment of ground covers.

#### Mulching:

A mulch is any material used to cover the soil surface for protection and improvement of the area covered. A mulch applied 2-3" deep will prevent weed seeds from sprouting and smother existing small weeds. Mulches also conserve soil moisture, improve soil structure, moderate soil temperatures and add beauty to the area by providing a decorative base for ornamental plants. There are two kinds of mulches, organic and inorganic.

#### Organic Mulches:

##### *(those coming originally from living plants)*

The budget-minded may wish to use an organic mulch, since several good mulches can be found in one's own backyard. Some examples of organic mulches are grass clippings, leaves, buckwheat hulls, bark (shredded or in chunks), wood chips or peanut shells. Plants mulched with fresh wood chips or corn cobs need additional nitrogen fertilizer to eliminate nitrogen deficiency while the mulch is decaying.

#### Inorganic Mulches:

##### *(not coming from living plants)*

Inorganic mulches are usually more expensive than most organic mulches, but they seldom need to be renewed, and no fertilizers need to be applied with them. They are more suitable for established landscape plantings than for flower beds which may be replanted annually. Crushed stone, gravel chips, or pebbles are common inorganic mulches. (When used near a lawn area, there is some danger that gravel may spill over into the lawn and be 'thrown' by a mower.) Black plastic is very effective in suppressing weed growth. Young plants may be transplanted into the soil through slits made in the plastic; seeds may be planted in a similar way. If a strip of plastic greater than 3' is used, additional holes must be made to permit penetration of water into the ground below. To improve the appearance of the area, a light covering of stone mulch or bark chips may be used on top of the plastic. Landscape fabric, a newer form of weed control, is used similarly to black plastic, however, due to its woven form, it allows water to penetrate easily.

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## Metal or Plastic Edging Materials

are used around flower or landscape plantings and also around trees in the lawn. They prevent grass from spreading into bed areas by forming a barrier against the roots. Edging materials are time-consuming to install initially, but there is little upkeep. For best results, set the edging so that only 1/2" is above the soil surface.

## Ground Cover Plants

suppress weed growth by competing for soil moisture and nutrients and by cutting off the light to young weed seedlings by their thick carpet-like growth. When used around landscape plantings, they eliminate the need for mowing while providing an attractive background for flowers and shrubs. There are ground covers suitable for almost any area, wet or dry, shady or sunny. Among the most commonly used and most adaptable are periwinkle (also called Vinca), Pachysandra and English ivy. All perennial weeds must be removed prior to planting ground covers. For more info on ground covers, request Home Grounds Fact Sheet D-1-3.

Chemical pesticides may be available. If you choose to use a chemical pesticide, contact your local Cooperative Extension office for specific recommendations.

## Chemical Weed Control

in landscape and flower plantings is generally impractical because of the many types of plants found around the home, all of which react to weed killers in different ways, as well as for all the inherent advantages offered by mulches. Read the label thoroughly before applying weed killers to determine which plants they may be used on and for proper dosage recommendations. Most of these herbicides will prevent germination of annual grasses and some broadleaf weeds. They will **not** control weeds already growing.

An excellent alternative is to accept the positive effect of mulches, and combine them with herbicides to cut down costs. Weed control is usually better when a herbicide is combined with a mulch. As little as a 1/2" to 1" layer of mulch with a herbicide may give better weed control than 3" layer without the herbicide. The mulch should be applied as soon as possible after the herbicide. The mulch application should then be followed by a thorough watering.

There are several steps that should be completed before the herbicide is applied in order to insure the best distribution of the herbicide and mulch. The soil

should be well-worked and should not be left cloddy. Clods should be broken and the soil surface left as flat and smooth as possible to avoid lumps of soil coming through the light mulch layer. This should be easily achieved by raking carefully or perhaps using a light roller.

No matter what herbicide is used, there is generally at least 1 weed that seems to thrive on it. The alert gardener will realize this and counteract it by shifting from one herbicide to the other.

## Precautions

Do not use chemical weed killers on rare or highly prized garden specimens.

Make sure all the plants in the area in which you are applying the weed killer are **listed on the label** as resistant species.

Do not dispose of weed killers and other pesticides through sewer systems. Consult your Town for the next S.T.O.P. (Stop Throwing Out Pollutants) program or pesticide collection day for proper disposal methods.

Do not use a sprayer previously used to apply lawn weed killers to spray herbicides or any other pesticide near ornamental plants.

Avoid inhaling weed killer vapors, and remove food and water containers when applying weed killers around pet areas.

Wear proper protective clothing when applying pesticides: chemical-resistant gloves, boots, respirator, etc.

If you spill a weed killer or other pesticide on yourself or your clothing, wash thoroughly and change to fresh clothing. Wash the contaminated clothing immediately, separate from other clothes.



"This publication contains pesticide recommendations. Changes in pesticide regulations occur constantly and human errors are still possible. Some materials mentioned may no longer be available, and some uses may no longer be legal. All pesticides distributed, sold or applied in New York State must be registered with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Questions concerning the legality and/or registration status for pesticide use in New York State should be directed to the appropriate Cornell Cooperative Extension specialist or your regional DEC office (631) 444-0341. Read the label before applying any pesticide. Cornell Cooperative Extension and its employees assume no liability for the effectiveness or results of any chemicals for pesticide usage. No endorsement of products is made or implied."