

weed or plant identification guide; ask your local County Extension Service, which is always concerned about reducing the population of noxious weeds in the area. Annual weeds and perennial weeds present different kinds of problems, so you need to know which is which before you can begin to effectively control the weeds in your landscape.

## Annual Weeds

Most weeds that you see in the landscape are annuals. They seem to survive all abuse during the growing season, yet do eventually die at the end of the season. If you allow them to, they will spread thousands of seeds over your yard to guarantee their return next year. Annual weeds are prolific. A single plant can produce enormous numbers of seeds. For example, a single chickweed will produce 15,000 seeds, shepherd's purse puts out 40,000 seeds, and good old lamb's-quarters is right up there with 70,000 seeds. All of these seeds lie in the soil, just waiting for the light and water they need to germinate. As you might guess, the key to controlling annual weeds is to control their seeding activity.

### Controlling Annual Weeds

To reduce if not eliminate annual weeds in the landscape, you want either to break the reproductive cycle of the weeds already on your property or keep new weeds from getting into the yard in the first place.

The best way to control annual weeds is to prevent them from emerging by cultivating the soil and then mulching the garden beds and around shrubs and trees. Lightly turn over the top 2 inches of soil in your garden beds 10 to 14 days before setting out plants in the spring. Most of the annual weed seeds that are on or near the surface of the soil will sprout within two weeks. Once they have, rake the soil lightly to destroy the tender young plants. Rake or hoe to a very shallow depth so that you wipe out the weed seedlings without bringing more weed seeds to the surface. Weed seeds require light to germinate. Those too deep in the soil to germinate may remain viable for many years and are just wait-

ing for you to bring them to the surface.

Now you can plant your seeds or your annual flower sets, which will get a much better start with less competition from the annual weeds. Ten days after planting, cultivate the garden again around your new plants, still working at a very shallow level.

Those three cultivations should keep the annual weeds from getting a foothold. Occasional hand pulling should be all that's needed to keep them down. Mulching at this time will eliminate even this task.

If you don't use mulch in your garden or around your shrubs, an effective way to break the reproductive cycle of annual weeds is to pull or cultivate those that do appear as soon as possible, before they have a chance to set seed and spread it through the garden. Try to get rid of annual weeds within the first three weeks of their growth. If you pull a few weeds each time you are in the yard, weed pulling never becomes an overwhelming task. This system of early pulling works in the lawn as well, but only if your lawn harbors a relatively small percentage of weeds. Weeds are easiest to uproot right after a rain, when the soil is damp. Try very hard to pull up the roots, rather than just breaking off the stems.

In general, if you are able to pull up all the annual weeds that do appear, you will have only about half as many weeds the next year, and half again the third year. Eventually, you will reach the point where weeds are a very minor issue in your landscape. It typically takes homeowners five to seven years of weeding to eliminate most of the annual weeds. If you mulch, too, annual weeds may be virtually gone in just two to three years.

## Perennial Weeds

Although the possibility of vast numbers of annual weeds popping up all over the garden seems intimidating, it's the perennial weeds that can cause the most serious problems in the lawn and garden, and they need very direct attention. Perennial weeds are tough plants that often grow right through a heavy mulch. To control perennials, you must con-

*(continued on page 402)*