

IS IT A WEED OR A FLOWER?

By Maritta Perry Grau, Frederick County Master Gardeners, May 2024

You've probably heard that a weed is just a plant in the wrong place. Often, that is true; however, there are some plants that are not only in the wrong place, but can be thugs, taking over the whole bed, whether flower or vegetable; they may reproduce quickly; and they may have tenacious root systems, making them next-to-impossible to get rid of. Yeah, I'm talking about you, bindweed, thistle, stilt grass, etc.

Now that the weather has warmed up, you may find a lot of different plants popping up in your gardens. Wondering if they are things you planted last summer? Last fall? Or is it something else? A flower? Or (shudder, Heaven forbid!) a weed? If you research the plant, plant or picture in hand, whether turning to a book (try *Weeds of the Northeast*) or the Internet, be alert for the following: First, identify both the common and, importantly, the Latin names, because often, a "common" name may be applied to several very different plants. Next, determine whether the plant is an annual, with a life cycle, **from** seed germination to seed dispersal, of just one year; a biennial, which grows one year and produces flowers/seeds the second year; or a perennial, which lives for two or more years. Perennials may be the most difficult of weeds to control.

If you need help to identify the plant(s), put it (including roots) in a plastic zip-loc bag and bring it to the Frederick County Master Gardeners' office at the University of Maryland Extension Building, 330 Montevue Lane, in Frederick; or e-mail a picture of the plant to our website, <http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening>.

Once you've identified the plant as a weed or at least as one that you don't want growing there (wherever "there" is), you have several options for removal: Mow it down, pull it up, or treat it with chemicals. While an herbicide at first glance may seem like the easiest choice, it's more likely to affect other aspects of the environment besides the plants and eventually to contribute to a negative impact on the health of the Chesapeake Bay. The following information is just a sampling of a few of the many options on handling weeds available to you at the UMD *website*, [Home and Garden Information Center | University of Maryland Extension \(umd.edu\)](http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening).

Hand-pulling and cultivating: You can hand-pull or dig out small weeds fairly easily, especially after a good rain. As for those perennials, dig, hoe, or pull up the plants carefully, getting out as much of the roots as you can. You may need to do this many times before the perennial gives up!

Mechanical removal: Mowing/trimming helps to prevent seed dispersal and to suppress broadleaf weeds; however, it doesn't work as well on grasses or perennials with well-established root systems. The UMD-HGIC site notes that in research trials, "Mugwort, a tough perennial weed with rhizomes, was able to keep growing after two years of repeated mowing." Discouraging, isn't it?

Mulching: Mulch, by itself or spread over thick layers of newspaper or landscape fabric, suppresses weeds; however, some tenacious perennial weeds may regrow and push through the mulch and more weed seeds will likely be deposited on the mulch by birds, mammals, or wind.

We look forward to helping you identify and choose the best methods to get rid of your weeds.



Canada Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), a perennial, often pops up in pastures and anywhere ground has been disturbed. It spreads both through seeds and by underground roots and is difficult to eradicate, as its root system may grow more than six feet down and spread more than 15 feet horizontally. (Photo courtesy of Cornell Weed Identification)

Crabgrass (*Digitaria sanguinalis*), a summer annual, is sometimes called hairy crabgrass. It has a prostrate growth habit, with lower stems spreading across the ground. It dies after the first heavy frost in the fall. (Photo courtesy of the UMD Home and Garden Information Center)



Ground Ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*) is a perennial, also called creeping Charlie. Although it prefers damp, shady areas, it can tolerate full sun. It reproduces primarily by creeping stems that root at the nodes. (Photo courtesy of the UMD Home and Garden Information Center)

Check our website or Facebook for upcoming free seminars, Master Gardener certification classes, as well as other announcements. For more information about the Frederick County Extension Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, gardening information and advice visit: <http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening> or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596. Find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/mastergardenersfrederickcountymaryland> .
UME Home & Garden Information Center,
<https://extension.umd.edu/programs/environmentnatural-resources/program-areas/home-and-garden-information-center> .

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