



## Grounds Maintenance

### Weeds

#### What is a Weed?

A weed is a plant that is growing in an area where it doesn't belong. Generally, most weeds are very good at surviving and can multiply more quickly than most plants. In a garden or on a lawn, weeds can rob other plants and grasses of nutrients and water from the soil, and light from the sun. Weeds must always be controlled. Weeds, like flowers, can be perennials or annuals. As a horticulture technician, it's important that you recognize some of the more common types of weeds and learn some of the basic techniques of weed control.

#### Annuals

Annual weeds complete their life cycle in one growing season. They have a fibrous root system that spreads out just beneath the surface of the soil. Annual weeds seem to pop up suddenly in little clusters around the parent weed. Some examples of annual weeds are thistles, crabgrass and chickweed.

#### Maintenance

The best defense against annual weeds is to “nip them in the bud”. It is important that you remove the weeds while they are still small and before they flower and spread their seeds. Annuals generally can be pulled by hand because their root system is close to the surface of the soil. You can also use a steel rake, hoe or cultivator to gently uproot them. You don't have to dig into the soil too deeply, just on the surface. Some annual seeds can lie dormant for up to seven years. The warm, wet, spring weather can encourage the seeds to sprout. It is a good practice to check for weeds every other day. If the weeds **have not flowered** you can pull them and leave them in the sun, and when they are dry, you can work them back into the soil. Remember, the weeds suck up a lot of nutrients, so recycle them and give the soil a boost.

#### Perennials

Perennial weeds live for many years. They have a taproot system that can grow deep into the soil. Perennial weeds are tough and well anchored, unlike the surface root system of annual weeds. The underground root system can stretch up to 20 feet away from the parent plant's location. If the taproot is cut, new plants will grow from the site. Some perennial weeds also have hard, woody stems which are very difficult to pull.



#### Maintenance

Perennial weeds must be carefully dug up. Cut back all stems above the ground and dig up the underground root. You must dispose of the seed heads and the roots carefully. Do not recycle or compost. It is important to dig up perennial weeds before you cultivate or rototill your soil. It is also important to keep the root intact to prevent new plants from sprouting. Pulling up perennial weeds is a strenuous job. The best time to attack these hardy weeds is after the first freeze and thaw in the late fall. Remember, soil contains pockets of air that collect water; when these pockets freeze and then thaw out, they **heave** the soil. When the soil heaves, it loosens and breaks apart, making it easier to pull up these tough weeds.



## Weed Control

The first step in weed control is recognizing problem plants. If you know what belongs, it will be easier to know what shouldn't be there. It is important that you take the time to learn what some of the most common weeds look like. The second step in weed control is action. If you see a weed, pull or dig it out. If you are not sure if it is a weed, ask your supervisor. Weed control is a task that all members of a landscaping crew share.

## Prevention

Herbicides can also be used to control weeds and prevent them from growing. Other ways to keep weeds from sprouting include the use of landscape fabrics and mulches.

