***THE BEST WAY TO DEAL WITH WEEDS -- IS TO PREVENT THEM.***

*Weed prevention in your garden begins with mulch.*

Of all the tasks we do in our gardens, one of the least enjoyable to most people is weeding. But there are simple steps you can take to significantly reduce them by changing the way you think about them and following good gardening practices.

**Stop tilling, digging and raking your soil.** At any given time, there are thousands of weed seeds in and on top of the soil in your garden, just waiting to sprout. Given a place to root and enough water and light, they will aggressively begin to grow. Every time you dig or rake your soil you are essentially taking the seeds on top – which may never germinate – and planting them into the soil. And you are taking the seeds that may have been too far down to sprout, and bringing them up to the light.

**Keep your soil covered.** Weeds get into your garden in a variety of ways. Some come through underground runners, but most come from seeds. They blow in on the wind or are dropped by birds, and sit there waiting for the chance to sprout. Bare soil is an open invitation for them to start growing and begin spreading. Keeping your soil covered with mulch is a very effective method of preventing this. ***Done right, mulch can be a miracle timesaver – but done improperly, it becomes a mess and can harm your garden.***

There are many different mulches available, but many of them are decorative and do not serve to nourish and build your soil. We’ve been very successful utilizing newspaper and ramial wood chips. Ramial wood chips are branches, with the greenery, that have been very *finely* chipped, and we sometimes have this available in the back of the garden.[[1]](#footnote-1) Weed your garden thoroughly and then lay down 5-6 sheets of overlapping newspaper or cardboard over all bare soil, and then cover with 3” of ramial woodchips. If you then add an additional layer of manure or compost on top, those woodchips will break down and compost in place and each time it rains, it will have the effect of pouring compost tea directly onto your garden and nourishing it.

***Do not mix mulch in with your soil.***As mulch decomposes, it ties of nitrogen and your plants will become nitrogen deficient. Separate your mulch from the soil with newspaper and let the wood chips and newspaper decompose naturally. When you need to plant, gently push the mulch aside, dig a hole through the paper and plant, and then replace materials in the order you removed them.

**Weeding efficiently.** Removeweeds when they are young, before they have a chance to grow deep roots. Young weeds come out much easier. They also come out much easier when the ground is wet, right after you’ve watered or it’s just rained. Never let your weeds flower and go to seed. The old adage rings true: one year of seeds, seven years of weeds.

***Weed Prevention on Gravel Paths***

*Weed prevention on paths begins in your garden.*

If you look at the new paths closely and notice where the weeds are growing, you’ll see that the centers of the paths are virtually weed free. That’s because while some seeds blow in on the wind or are dropped by birds, the majority of weeds are spreading from gardens. Once the weed seeds take root on the pathway edges, they are able to germinate and grow relatively undisturbed.

Our new paths all have a very heavy duty, commercial quality weed barrier underneath, but that weed barrier protects from weeds coming up from below, not above. The only situation in which weed barrier can prevent weeds from above is when it is used in a garden with nothing on top of it. In that case, it can prevent germination because there would be nothing for weed seeds to implant in. But once you cover it with anything, including gravel, there is a substrate for those weeds to imbed in. Here’s how to minimize them:

**Start with your garden.** If you’ve reduced the weeds in your garden, then you’ve already done the most significant thing to reduce weeds in your paths. Weeds in gardens can easily spread to paths via blowing seeds.

**Water your gardens, not your paths.** Gravel doesn’t need watering, but lurking weeds love it. Keep your water inside your gardens and if you have a leaking hose or spigot, please let us know.

**Keep as much organic material off the paths as possible**. Don’t dump dirt, mulch, clippings, leaves, straw or branches on the paths and clean up any spills. Use a basket or tarp to collect your clippings -- e*ven if you think you picked everything up, small particles of organic matter remain behind, and over time, they will provide a fertile medium for weeds to grow in.* A messy path will very quickly turn into a weedy path, which will then spread to your garden and back to the path. If you need to clean leaves, twigs or mulch off of your path, you can use a plastic leaf rake, or very lightly use a bow rake to gather everything into a pile and then remove the pile, taking care not to damage the barrier cloth.

**Weed early and often.** Weeds in the new path should pull out easily when they are young, as if they are pulling out of sand. Once they are allowed to grow, the root systems become bigger and if they get big enough they can start to damage the barrier cloth. In many cases, you can simply use the bottom of your foot to scuff tiny weeds out, which you can then easily remove.

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If you’ve followed the above tips, and continue to follow them, you should experience a very significant reduction in weeds, both in your gardens and paths. And as always – be a good neighbor. Weeds don’t just affect our own gardens, but the gardens of those around us. If you’d like more help or a demonstration of how to mulch, please contact the secretary at rigardenclub@gmail.com.

1. For those of you with cars, if you’re willing to drive out to Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn, they have giant piles of mulch available at all times that is made from their many acres of trees. It is better quality than any mulch you can buy and it is free for the taking. Simply show up with bags and a shovel and ask to be directed to the mulch pile. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)