

The Garden Plot, June 2007

By Robin Mittenthal, University Apartments Community Gardens Committee

If you started gardening early this year, you might have had up to 6 weeks when your garden looked neat and clean with very little effort, and everything that was there was there because you had put it there. Thanks to weeds, that may now have changed, and your garden could be looking quite messy.

What to do? First, don't give up! Weed a little at a time. For weeds that are less than 5 cm (2 in) tall, weeding with just your hand may do. Larger weeds will require the use of a tool such as a spade or trowel. However you weed, make sure that you get not just the part of each weed that is above ground, but the roots, too. Weeding when the soil is wet can make this easier. Dig up or pull up each weed, shake the soil off the roots, and throw the weed in a pile. When you are done weeding, carry your weeds to a place *outside* your garden. They may start to grow again if you don't!

Two of the worst weeds in Wisconsin are quackgrass and Canada thistle. Quackgrass isn't very special-looking aboveground, but spreads underground using thick, fat, white roots. When you remove quackgrass from your garden, you **MUST** try to remove these roots. If you don't, a section of root as short as 5 cm (2 in) can grow a whole new plant. The same is true for Canada thistles, which are spiny, deep-rooted plants that are painful to touch.

If you can't dig out Canada thistle and quackgrass because they are growing in and around your vegetables and flowers, then at least pull off the green tops as soon as they come up. If you do this regularly, the weeds will eventually become weak and die.

When you have weeded a section of your garden, mulch everything you can to minimize your future weed problems. "Mulch" is a term used for leaves, straw, newspaper, cardboard, plastic, or any material used to cover the soil, keep weeds from growing, and reduce the need for watering. If your plants are big enough, you can place leaves or straw around them to a depth of up to 20 cm (8 in). Or, you can put down 6 or 8 layers of newspaper or 2 or 3 layers of thick cardboard, watering each layer after you put it down to keep it in place. If you work carefully, you can mulch between plants that are less than 10 cm [4 in] apart. Unfortunately, plants like radishes never get big enough for you to mulch around them without burying them. To protect these crops, you must just keep weeding.

Besides weeding, there's planting and watering to be done. If you have not put them in, now is a good time to plant so-called "warm season" crops like tomatoes, eggplant, winter squash, and watermelons. If these crops go in much later than the beginning of July, they will not produce a harvest before they are killed by frost.

If it has not rained lately, use a sprinkler to water once or twice a week for 30-45 minutes during the cooler part of the day (5 p.m. to 10 a.m.). **NEVER** water all day or all night – the soil just doesn't need that much water!

If you need more information about gardening, e-mail me at [mittenth@gmail.com](mailto:mittenth@gmail.com) or visit the Eagle Heights Gardens web site at <http://www.eagleheightsgardens.org/>.

Happy gardening!