



Keeping Ahead of Weeds in your Flowerbeds

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A weed is a plant that is growing where we don't want it to grow. Even a beautiful flower can be considered a weed, if it is growing in the wrong place. We would all love to have flowerbeds and borders that are attractive and weed free, but sometimes getting rid of weeds seems like too much work. I discovered that with a little planning I could manage the weeds in my flowerbeds, and if I can do it, then you can too!

Time spent developing a weed management plan for your flowerbeds will save you a lot of work later on.

Before planting flowerbeds follow these steps:

1. If the area has weeds already, it will be easier to clear them out now rather than after you plant. Scraping the weeds off with a hoe or pulling them by hand (if the weeds are easy to remove) works well. If it is a large area and the amount of weeds seems too overwhelming, then try other methods such as mowing weeds or cutting weeds down with a string trimmer followed by raking or rototilling, applying postemergent herbicides, or using soil solarization (if the timing is right).
2. Now is also the time to check the drainage and compaction of the area to be planted. If the soil is compacted or heavy clay and water infiltrates very slowly, then weeds will often grow better than ornamental plants. The solution is to shovel or rototill in about an inch of compost to improve the structure of the soil, mixing it uniformly 4-8 inches deep.
3. Once you've cleared and leveled the area, then sprinkle it with lots of water to germinate as many weed seeds as possible. Wait a few weeks then hoe away all the weeds, trying not to dig in too deeply. It should be much easier this second time and now you've just eliminated a whole bunch of future weeds.
4. Plant your flower seeds or transplant your ornamental plants now.



A thick layer of mulch helps keep weeds under control and minimizes hand cultivation in established flowerbeds.

After planting weed management should become part of your routine gardening. The goals are to prevent weeds from getting started in the flowerbed, control weeds when they are small (because it is so much easier), and prevent weeds from flowering, setting seed and dispersing it in your flowerbeds.



A scuffle hoe is much easier to use in landscapes than the traditional hoe.

Reducing water over-spray will reduce the number of weeds that can germinate and grow. Drip irrigation is a good way to direct the water to where it is needed around the plants and leaves the unplanted areas dry. Scrape the surface with a hoe to remove any weeds that do grow. Speaking of hoes...have you ever used a “hula hoe” or scuffle hoe? These are so much easier to use than a regular hoe and very effective in slicing through weed stems.

Mulch is one of the best ways to keep weeds to a minimum. Most plants need sunlight to grow. Applying a 2-inch layer of medium size mulch on top of soil prevents sunlight from reaching weed seeds and very few will germinate. Weed seedlings that do grow are often weaker and easier to hand pull or hoe away.

Large established flowerbeds may require too much time and energy to keep weed free by hand pulling, especially when annual or seedy perennial weeds are prevalent. Applying a preemergent herbicide at the proper time of the year can be the most cost effective tool to keep your weeds to a minimum. There are two main seasons of weed flushes in

the Central Valley: spring and fall. For best results preemergent herbicides should be applied 2-4 weeks before weeds emerge and they need to be sprinkled in with water or timed before a rain. Check that your weeds are listed on the label and be sure to read and follow package instructions.



A thick layer of mulch inhibits light penetration to the soil which prevents weed seeds from germinating.

It is generally not recommended to control existing weeds in flowerbeds with postemergence herbicides because they will damage ornamental plants. A few spot sprays may be successful providing desirable plants are protected from the spray and spray drift. Hand-weeding and cultivation are better choices, but avoid shaking the weeds when you pull them as this just scatters the seeds. Don't be tempted to blow your old dandelion flowers!

If you develop a routine schedule for working in your flowerbeds, then weed control will become easier and your flowerbeds will be a source of pride.

For more detailed information on weed management in landscapes or specific herbicides, visit the UC IPM (Integrated Pest Management) website and view the various Pest Notes on Weeds: <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/menu.weeds.html>