

Tips for Managing Oxalis



University of California

Agriculture and Natural Resources

UCCE Master Gardener Program

A client from Berkeley called recently asking how to control or eradicate yellow flowering oxalis.

There are two types of yellow flowering oxalis that are common weeds in Bay Area gardens. The first is quite showy in the spring with bright lemon yellow flowers that grow on tall thin stems. It's commonly known as Bermuda Buttercup or Sourgrass (*Oxalis pes-caprae*). The other, Creeping Woodsorrel (*Oxalis corniculata*), grows low, hugging the ground, has small yellow flowers and is frequently a problem in lawns.

Bermuda Buttercup is originally from South Africa and was introduced to North America as an ornamental. It is a small, upright growing perennial with bright yellow flowers and clover like leaves. In California, it doesn't produce viable seed but forms a small bulb or bulblet. The bulbs are spread by cultivation or moving the soil around. This weed is difficult to eradicate but can be reduced through digging up the bulbs over and over again and by pulling the top



growth to reduce the energy stored in the bulbs below the soil level. Herbicides can be used to kill the top growth of this weed, but the bulbs will persist in the soil and new plants will grow from them. Persistent weeding is key to control.



Sheet mulching or solarization are two nonchemical options that can help control Bermuda Buttercup, especially in larger areas that haven't already been planted. Sheet mulching involves laying down a barrier, such as cardboard which is air and water

permeable and applying a thick layer, 2-3 inches, of organic mulch on top. The cardboard will eventually breakdown but in the meantime it will suppress the growth of Bermuda Buttercup and weaken the bulbs. Solarization involves putting down clear plastic during warm sunny weather for a period of 4-6 weeks. The sun through the plastic heats up the soil killing many soil pathogens and weed seeds including the bulbs. This technique is most effective in the warmer areas of Alameda County.

Creeping Woodsorrel is also a perennial, grows low and can spread with above ground horizontal stems that can root at the joints (nodes), allowing it to invade more area. This weed has a long taproot



and can be removed by hand, but you must get all of the root. Otherwise, pieces of the root will generate more plants. It does not have underground bulbs, but spreads through seeds. The seeds form in a capsule and when ripe the capsule ruptures shooting the seeds many feet from the original plant. Solarization of the soil, sheet mulching or cultivating, watering and then weeding the small seedlings that emerge are some ways of controlling this weed. If you choose the latter method (cultivating, watering and weeding) you will likely need to repeat this process several times through the spring and

summer. The seeds need light to germinate so using 2-3 inches of mulch can help control this weed in garden beds.

A herbicide can be used at the weeding stage to kill the plants, instead of hand pulling them. In some situations a pre-emergent herbicide is used (pre-emergent herbicides prevent seeds from germinating; timing is important for its successful use). If you choose to use a herbicide please carefully read all instructions prior to purchase to make sure it's the right product for your situation.

The link below provides more information on managing these two difficult-to-control perennial weeds as well as information on herbicide use:

<http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7444.html>

For details on how to do solarization please see:

<http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74145.html>

Identification is important for effective management of weeds. Knowing what the weed is, whether it is annual or perennial, how it grows and reproduces will provide keys to the most effective management approaches.

For more help in identifying weeds visit:

http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/weeds_intro.html

Got home gardening questions?

The Alameda County Master Gardener's help line is staffed Monday, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 510-639-1371 or email us at anrmgalameda@ucanr.edu If emailing please provide the following information:

- Name, phone number and city
- Problem description - name of plant if applicable, when the problem began, cultural history such as watering, fertilizing, pruning, pesticides, etc.
- Photographs of the problem, if possible