

I have been getting calls about controlling whitetop and field bindweed in landscape situations. Whitetop, also known as hoary cress, is native to Europe and Asia. It was accidentally introduced to North America. Since its introduction, it has become very invasive. It spreads by seed but especially by underground root runners (rhizomes). A few initial plants can produce hundreds more within a few years. Scientists found evidence that it produces compounds that diminishes germination of other plant species growing near it and the vigor of plants that are germinated and growing near it. Whitetop thrives in areas with disturbed or bare soil and in unhealthy lawns.

Field bindweed, often mistakenly called morning glory, is native to the Middle East to climates very similar to those in the arid west. It was also accidentally introduced. Many farms were lost during the depression because there was no way to control it besides constant cultivation and hand pulling. Its vines clog farm equipment. Even now, anyone rototills soil where field bindweed is present, finds it has this ability. Field bindweed spreads through rhizomes, seeds and vines rooting into the soil. Seeds can last in the soil for between 25 – 50 years.

Controlling both of these requires patience and consistency. In open areas without other desirable plants, the area can be covered with large sheets of cardboard. Overlap each piece 6 inches and then peg them down with landscape staples. Bicycle shops and appliance dealers often have large, used boxes available. After laying the cardboard, cover it with 2 – 3 inches of inexpensive shredded mulch from a green waste facility, a local arborist company or similar. Neither weed will grow through this combination. After one year, expect to see a 50 – 75 percent reduction in the number of weeds. Limitation of this include the cardboard needing to be replaced every year or two, and when mulch is removed and the areas is used for something else, weeds can regenerate from seeds in the soil and potentially from the deep roots.

In many situations, it may be practical to pull or shallowly cultivate both. Both plants, when pulled break off quite shallowly, though, leaving to roots behind. It is impossible to remove entire plants unless they are new seedlings. If you choose pull or shallowly cultivate, be consistent in doing so every few weeks to deplete the energy reserves in the roots. Cultivating or pulling them without consistent follow up may actually spread them by generating multiple new plant where they broke off underground that are then not pulled. It can take up to nine years of this to effectively control field bindweed.

There are several herbicides that are suppress or eventually control both registered for residential use. Early fall is the best time of year to use them. In garden areas, an herbicide containing glyphosate may be used. Spray in the spring with glyphosate a few weeks ahead of when you plant. Mix a spreader-sticker with the glyphosate spray to get better penetration into the plants.

In lawn areas, there are a few brands of weed killers containing the herbicide quinclorac that are especially effective. Image All In One Lawn Weed Killer, Q4 Plus and Ortho Roundup for Lawns are some. In open areas, any of these products as well as glyphosate are fine to use. Be sure to read and follow the label of any pesticide. Mention of specific brands is not an endorsement of these particular brands.