

Historic Gardening Methods

I enjoy searching for books and information pertaining to historical gardening methods and comparing them to modern techniques. In one of these books from the WWII era I found a section pertaining to weed control. It offered advice that is still sound today and even listed several chemicals used to control weeds that, interestingly, today most likely would never be allowed. However, I was somewhat surprised that no information concerning weed prevention was included. There are actually many methods that can be used to prevent weeds. Some include use of mulches, managing irrigation correctly and selective use of herbicides.

Mulching is one of the most effective and safest methods of preventing weeds. It can additionally be inexpensive or free. When I need mulch in my garden, I collect grass clippings and place them two to three inches deep around my garden plants. Some weeds still come through, but far fewer.

Another advantage to mulching is that it conserves water. In my own garden, plants that have been mulched tend to need less irrigation. Mulching can also help prevent blossom end rot in tomatoes and peppers that can be caused by extreme fluctuations in water levels in the soil.

Along the lines of irrigation, careful water management is very effective at preventing weeds. Growing up, my dad used drip and selective irrigation in his garden that only watered around the base of the vegetables and nowhere else. Non-irrigated areas were far less likely to have weeds germinate in them.

Another method that reduces the number of weeds that germinate in the garden is the use of pre-emergent herbicides. These are available in many forms, and are applied to the soil surface to kill newly germinated seedlings. Be aware that these products do not somehow discriminate between vegetable and weed seeds and will kill newly emerging vegetables as easily as weeds. They can be applied around established plants and rooted transplants plants such as tomatoes and peppers and last for several weeks. However, use cautiously and follow the label exactly. A label will list what crops a particular product may be used around and when to apply. Additionally, once pre-emergent herbicides are applied, disturb the soil as little as possible.

A common product that can be used around many garden plants is treflan. It is marketed by many companies. An organic or more natural option that can be effective is corn gluten meal. It is available in both powdered and granular forms.

On occasion, certain weeds cannot easily be controlled using the above methods. When this occurs, the use of other herbicides such as glyphosate and 2, 4-D containing products may be required to suppress or control them. When using these products, try to do so before the garden is planted or after the fall harvest to minimize risk. For weeds that live longer than one or two years, spraying in the fall may better control them because the chemical stays in the root system all winter. As with pre-emergent herbicides, always follow the label.