

## SOG Notebook for Urban Organic Vegetable & Herb Gardening

### Weed Wisdom

By Rob Danforth

Weeds compete with vegetables for nutrients, sun, and root room in all gardens. Weeding is time consuming, labour intensive, and frustrating because weeds will return. Mother Earth always dresses in green as soon as she feels uncovered. However, she will accept, temporarily, any coverings that we provide (e.g., Mulch!).

*(Container-sized tomatoes, weeds & dill from seeds in our potting mix)*



## Weed Facts:

- Weed seeds survive in the soil or compost for a great many years. Tilling the soil every spring brings them to the surface where they enjoy both sun and water. In addition, weed seeds can migrate into your containers (wind, birds, clothing) at any time.
- Weeds come in waves at various times in the season and some come in more than one wave (e.g., crabgrass, dandelion, plantain, purslane, galinsoga, lamb's quarters, ragweed).
- Some weeds can hurt you: Some have sap that is light sensitive and will blister skin when exposed to sunlight (e.g., wild parsnip), some have thorns (e.g., thistle), some cause a severe rash (e.g., poison ivy), some can cause allergic reactions (e.g., ragweed), and some are poisonous to eat (e.g., deadly nightshade). **Tip:** Wear gloves, beware of sap on clothing which may transfer to your skin, and don't compost these!

## Permit Useful Weeds?

- Some weeds are edible if grown on pollution free ground and they can increase your harvest (e.g., purslane, pig weed, & dandelion).
- Weeds in flower are a source of food for beneficial insects, attracting both pollinators and insect predators.
- Weeds gather nutrients from various depths, they convert to plant-ready food when they die, and they give back nutrients slowly like slow acting medication.
- Weeds, alive or dead, provide ground cover to prevent soil erosion.
- Weeds can suggest soil conditions. Some indicate a lack or an abundance of certain nutrients, and some weeds tell if the soil is too compacted or too wet.
- Some weeds are especially helpful in composting (e.g., Stinging Nettles, Comfrey).



## Solutions:

1) Try *High density planting shown above*. This covers the soil and deprives weeds of light and room to grow



2) Try various mulches (stones, glass beads, brick chips, straw, grass clippings, shredded leaves, etc.) to cover exposed soil and retain moisture.

*(Straw mulch)*



*(Stones or glass beads as mulch and heat sink combined)*

Container weeds are far fewer than those in in-ground plots and can be pulled every 2<sup>nd</sup> week. **Tip:** if pulling weeds will unsettle plants or uproot seedlings at the same time, scissor or prune the weeds at soil level so as to leave seedlings and plants undisturbed.

Using mulches, allowing certain weeds, and scheduled weeding weekly can contribute greatly to successful and enjoyable organic container gardening!

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