

## DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

# Think MOSH: Mulch-Out-Spray-Heat

BY SIOUX ROGERS



Sioux Rogers

Most weeds are considered a menacing nuisance. There are many ways to annihilate most of the unwanted. The following points will help you do the needed deed.

**Mulch.** Do this early in the year before all those weedy things arrive. The best mulches use organic matter. Straw, grass, pine needles, wood chips, cardboard, and newspaper are some possible organic mulches.

I love the clean, neat look of straw. (Be sure to use straw, though, and not hay, which has weed seeds and is mixed with forage.) Straw works especially well under fruits, such as strawberries, pumpkins, squashes, and melons. Grass clippings are good sometimes, but they tend to compact down and also may have weed seeds. I prefer to save grass clippings for the compost pile or for litter in the chicken coop.

Newspaper, cardboard, and chips are a perfect trio for successful mulching. Put down several layers of newspaper, followed by cardboard, and topped off with wood chips, straw, pine needles, or another organic mulch. To be worth your time, finished mulch should be about four inches deep.

Pine needles can be used around acid-loving plants, like blueberries and strawberries. Slip some pine needles under the strawberries to keep chewing bugs away from the fruit.

**Out** (as in "Out those weeds!"). Remove, pull, disembark the unwanted



Mulching between rows using cardboard and straw prevents weeds from competing with water and nutrients needed for vegetables. Photo: 3.bp.blogspot.com.

things. You do this manually, best after a light rain. Make sure when you have removed the big ugly, you have all the root. When you leave a portion of a weed's DNA, i.e., its root, in the ground, it will happily return. This is well illustrated with blackberries. A small piece of root left in or lying on the ground will recolonize in the battle area.

**Spray.** There are many commercial organic sprays that kill weeds. There are also many home brews. Here is one easy and effective spray, homemade and safe:

Mix a gallon of vinegar with a cup of borax and a tablespoon of dish soap (to help the other two ingredients stick to the leaves) and spray on the leaves of unwanted weeds. Sprays seem to be best absorbed when temperatures are between 65 and 85 degrees. Regardless of the type of spray, aim carefully, as sprays usually do not know a weed from a petal.

When sprayed in the morning of a warm day, weeds should shrivel by the afternoon.

Be safe when spraying, as even organic sprays can ouch your eyes or skin. Safety

first: wear gloves and eye protection.

**Heat,** as in pour on boiling water or use a flame, like from a propane torch. The torch method works great in a gravel driveway. It is effective, nontoxic, and easy. Of course, it has a rather specific use. In your garden, where there might be heavy growth around the plants where you want to do the weeding, aim carefully. You don't want to set your pants on fire. Boiling water, carefully poured at the root base or spread over a small patch of weeds, actually works.

Speaking of weeds, how the heck did they get there? Certainly you did not plant them. Here is the "shopping list" of possibilities: birds, shoes, dogs, fresh manure, clothing, uncomposted compost, wind, and a freshly dug clump of a neighbor's gift plant. Despite most weeds being unwanted, there are many good and beneficial weeds. Dandelions, to mention one of my favorite weeds in the Applegate, are also a favorite seed source for the local lark sparrow and American goldfinch.

"If weeds constantly overrun your garden rows, ask yourself what those are and why they are growing there. Put down the hoe long enough to consider what the weeds are telling you." — Sarah Owens, *Sourdough: Recipes for Rustic Fermented Breads, Sweets, Savories, and More*

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Sioux Rogers

dirtyfingernails@fastmail.fm

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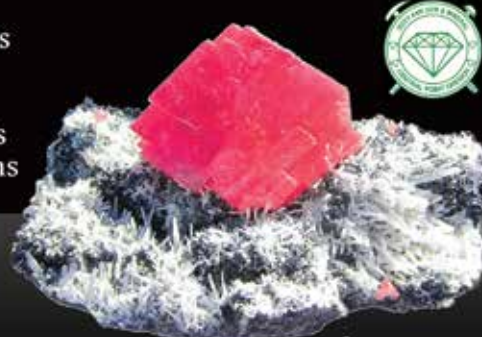
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