

## Weeds

Barbara Wagner

Erie County Master Gardener

When I moved last August, I found myself the owner of some beautiful knockout roses, autumn joy sedum, and astilbe. Now that spring is here, there are new surprises. One I enjoy, bright yellow daffodils. The other not so much, weeds galore in my garden beds, in particular one old garden foe, wild garlic, and one new one, common chickweed.

Gardeners know that weeds are a problem in the garden. First they compete for nutrients and water with your favorite plants, second they are unsightly, and third, they proliferate – some at tremendous rates. So identifying and eliminating the weeds in your garden is important.

I have dealt with wild garlic before. Missouri Botanical Gardens gives its scientific name is *Alium vineale* and it is related to wild onion, *Alium canadense*. Both grow in grasslike upright leaves but those of the wild garlic are hollow and wild onion are solid and flat. Mine is definitely wild garlic.

Both are winter perennials which grow from underground bulbs which multiply. The plants emerge in the early spring and go dormant in the summer. They cannot be eradicated by handpulling, though pulling off the top of the plant can keep it from flowering and going to seed with aerial bulbets.

So to get rid of the plant without chemicals, you must dig deep enough to get out the bulb. Missouri Botanical Gardens says to “replace the whole shovelful of soil with clean soil.” I dug out many plants a week ago and noticed new ones yesterday. This will be an ongoing battle.

Wild garlic cannot be controlled by pre-emergent, but the plants can be chemically eradicated, another ongoing battle, requiring treatment in the early spring, possibly for three to four years. The chemicals that treat wild garlic will also kill the other plants, not a choice I want to take.

And the chances are that this plant is also growing in my yard, not just the flower beds. It is difficult to see the grasslike leaves in mown grass. So this is one weed, I am going to just have to keep digging out and hope to get controlled.

Common chickweed, *Stellaria media*, is a new challenge for me. It is growing all over the development where I live. *Weeds of Northeast Ohio* identifies it as a “winter annual that can become perennialized in cool moist areas.” It reproduces from seeds that germinate in early spring and late summer. So for nonchemical eradication, it is necessary to pull up the plants now before they go to seed.

The plants are small clusters of tiny oval green leaves growing opposite on long stems. The leafy stems fan out near the ground. The flowers are tiny – no bigger than ¼ inch and look like tiny daisies. There appear to be ten petals, but there are really only five. Many of the smaller plants are growing upright, but the larger clusters have begun to vine out over the garden.

Common chickweed can be controlled with pre-emergents. But last year's long wet spring and early summer was a challenge for keeping all our gardens weed free even with pre-emergent. This year's abundant growth is probably related to the seeds of last year.

Common chickweed can also be eradicated by chemical means, again killing off the other plants in your garden. For names of appropriate chemicals, see educational websites such as Missouri Botanical Gardens or Ohio State University Extension.

Of course I have other weeds in my garden like dandelions and wild lettuce. Two I watch out for and chemically treat are Canadian thistle and Poison Ivy. But the two challenges for now are clear: wild garlic and common chickweed.