

Natural Succession

Rather than growing out of spite, weeds are volunteering to live in a habitat they thrive in - disturbed or turned over soil. These plants are first to arrive after an earthquake, meteor, humans or beavers kill trees in a forest. Like a skin graft, they cover the exposed tissue of life - soil. Over time, herbs and grasses give way to shrubs, brambles and finally trees in a natural process called **succession**. In this part of the world, life wants to make old growth forest. In others, coral reefs or jungles.

Conventional farms and gardens work against this trend by maintaining a mulched area of bare soil in which select annual species grow. Controlling and restraining succession is a more difficult and energy intensive way to grow food than forest gardening, in part because of the continual weeding it takes to control and restrain succession.

Weeds aren't bad, evil, foreign, invasive, out to kill your plants or ruin your day – any anger we feel towards them is misplaced frustration from our adherence to a gardening strategy made difficult by working against an ecosystems' momentum towards becoming forest.

Family Reunion Moments:

Plants are beings who live on the same planet as ourselves. We are both twigs on the same family tree and are therefore actually and literally cousins, not just in a metaphorical or technical sense. This means we are relatives, alive at the same time. Can we reframe weeding, or any interaction with a plant, as a 'family reunion moment'?

We have a choice in our approach to weeding. Are we vengefully killing bad-guys who have immigrated into our garden illegally? Or are we tenderly killing our living relatives, who we recognize have chosen to live in the garden to help return it to old growth forest, but whom we ask to sacrifice their bodies so that we may keep these gardens accessible, and that the vegetables we've planted may thrive? This is easy to do if we remember gratitude for the gifts they offer the community of life, and respect of their powers.

If you'd like to learn more about Help Yourself, or get further involved in any way, see the **Maintenance Guidelines & Volunteer Opportunities** pamphlet.

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HELP YOURSELF!

Volunteer Weeding Guide

How you can help:

HYS plantings are maintained by volunteers. Can you plug in for even 5 min. at a garden bed, right now? How about once or twice a week? Consult the plant list below, and weed on! Feel free to invite passers by to help. If you come across ripe vegetables, by all means help yourself! You can move the 'ripe now!' signs around the garden as appropriate.

Weeding Goals:

Help Yourself! aims to keep its public plantings as weed free as possible, with large, familiar, recognizable, and high yielding vegetables. We want the public to feel these gardens are accessible and inviting, and to model ongoing maintenance and strong organizational capacity of the project.

Keeping these gardens beautiful in the eyes of powerful institutions in the area is important, as they may consider proposals to transform their lawns into gardens in the future.

Weeding 101:

Pull the plants gently out of the soil, trying to get their roots. They come up easier if the soil is damp, like after a rain. Shake the dirt of the roots back into the garden beds. Check for seeds or fruits on the plants. If there aren't any, you can lay their bodies back down in the garden as mulch, root side up so they will dry out and die. If there are seeds or fruits, don't put them back in the bed. You can make piles in the paths, and dump them nearby afterwards.

If you can't beat them, eat them!

Many common 'weed' species are edible. Consult the list below for more information. You can dry many species for tea, or make tinctures for medicine, salves for skin conditions, compost, string, chicken food, and more. Remember that wild plants are many times more nutritious than cultivated vegetables, are organic, and are free and abundant!

Please remove these species:

For more information and pictures, consult the 'weed profiles' poster on the info board.

Grass: all species, pick seeds from mulch hay.

Wood sorrel: Edible. Refreshing sour leaves, yellow flowers and small star-fruits.

Ragweed: Prodigious self-seeder, some folks allergic in late summer.

Burdock: Biennial, edible nutritious taproot, blanched leaf stems, peeled flower stalk.

White clover: Edible leaves and flowers. Nitrogen fixer. Don't pull out! Leaving in garden fertilizes soil.

Thumbprint knotweed: Edible. Steam or stirfry leaves and pink, crunchy flowers.

Garlic mustard: Edible raw or cooked leaves. Mustard made from seeds.

Staghorn sumac: Edible red and fuzzy fruits source of pink lemonade, sour seasoning. Edible peeled young shoots. Poison sumac has white and smooth fruit.

Lamb's quarters (goosefoot): Edible leaves in salad, stirfry. Use seeds like poppy or grain.

Dandelion: Edible, detoxifying flowers, leaves and roots in salads or cooked.

Plantain: Edible protein rich leaves. Salad, 'kale chips', or stirfry. Seeds laxative. Chewed leaf cures bee sting and pulls out splinters.

Oriental bittersweet & Virginia creeper: Inedible, toxic. Stripped vines used for baskets, rope.

Wild lettuce: ancestor of lettuce. Edible young leaves. Medicinal: sedative, pain killer, best to extract in vinegar.

Goldenrod: Edible young greens, yellow flower buds and leaf tops tea for ragweed allergies.

Some food for thought:

Unwanted, Inferior, and Uncontrolled?

weed |wēd| : (*noun*) a wild plant growing where it is not wanted and in competition with cultivated plants. (*verb*) to remove unwanted or inferior plants from an area or garden.

Though cultivated vegetables are often larger than their wild counterparts, they are not necessarily more edible. Many so-called weeds are delicious, many times more nutritious than cultivated veggies, and easier to grow. In fact, in many parts of the world they *are* grown, as legitimate vegetables themselves. This shows that a plant's 'weed status' is in fact a cultural preference, and does not represent universal inedibility or badness.

These weeds often re-seed vigorously – a desirable asset for a vegetable. However, this often frustrates human gardeners who invest a lot of time and energy in their gardens, in hopes that only the planted veggies thrive and ripen. To this end, much garden work involves pulling out plants which arrive on their own from beyond the boundaries of our gardens, from a region we call the 'wild', (a place inhabited by barbarous peoples):

wild |wīld| (*adjective*): **1** (of an animal or plant) living in the natural environment; not domesticated. (of people) not civilized; barbarous. **2** uncontrolled or unrestrained.