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How Can I Control Mallor Weeds And What About Ants, Readers Ask

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A weekly question/answer column

How Can I Control Mallow Weeds And What About Ants, Readers Ask

Specialists answer:

April 26, 2001

Question: Do you have some advice on how to control mallow weeds? This has been an ongoing problem that even the powerful herbicides can only contain for just a few weeks. They always come back and completely overrun my garden. Any advice?

Answer: As you have discovered, a mature mallow weed is quite tolerant of most yard-and-garden herbicides, including Roundup and 2,4-D. The herbicides often cause mallow to go yellow, and some of the plants may die; but many eventually recover to become even tougher than they were before they were sprayed.

You probably also have found that pulling, hoeing or rototilling large mallow plants is difficult and only partially effective. Then, there is also the problem of mallow seeds in the soil. Mallow is a prolific seed producer, and its seeds can lay dormant in the soil for years before germinating. In a typical garden there are thousands and thousands of mallow seeds already in the soil just waiting for the right time and conditions to germinate. Whenever those conditions occur, a few new mallow seedlings will emerge; but the majority of the seeds remain dormant awaiting a future opportunity.

Each time it rains or whenever the garden is irrigated, a few more mallow seeds will germinate. So, even if you were successful in killing all of the emerged mallow plants with a single herbicide application, a new flush of seedlings would still appear after each watering or rainfall event for the next several years.

The best advice I can give is to be persistent, and to kill or remove mallow plants when they are small. The strategy is to deplete the soil of its mallow seed supply by eliminating all emerging mallow plants before they have a chance to make more seeds and replenish the supply in the soil. Pulling, hoeing or rototilling can be very effective against small mallow plants. Mallow is also much more sensitive to herbicides when in the seedling and early vegetative stages (before plants get more than two or three inches wide).

Whichever control method you choose, do it early in the development of the weeds. That's when they are easiest to control, and it's the only way to deplete the soil seed supply. It will probably take several years of weeding every couple of weeks before you see the results of reducing the number of dormant mallow seeds in the soil. But in the long run, I believe that's the only way to make real progress.

- Steve Dewey, Utah State University Extension Weed Specialist

Question: I built a house last year and we have ants all over. They are coming back now that

the weather is warming up. What can I do to get rid of them?

Answer: The best method of control varies by the species of ant. Some species of ants like sweets, while others like oils and meat products, such as pet food. Large black ants and carpenter ants live inside houses in damp areas and decaying wood, while other species maintain nests in the soil outside of homes.

When ants locate a food supply, they lay down an odor trail back to the nest so others can find the supply. Generally speaking, the best control is to eliminate the food supply, destroy the odor trail by washing the surface and use caulking material to plug up any cracks or holes by which the ants are entering the home.

Sticky traps, such as those used to catch cockroaches, can also be used to control ants. If using this method, however, it is important to eliminate the food supply and odor trails as well, because the lack of ants returning to the nest will stimulate the queen to produce more replacement workers.

- Jay B Karren, Utah State University Extension Entomology Specialist
