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1-1-1999

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Recommended Citation

Hinkamp, Dennis, "Morning Glory Is Gory" (1999). *All Archived Publications*. Paper 866. http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension_histall/866

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GARDEN NOTES

MORNING GLORY IS GORY

By Dennis Hinkamp

May 1999 Spring-12

It's more persistent and annoying than a telemarketer, and it's probably the plant that inspired the "Body Snatcher" movies. Calling it "Morning Glory" is the work of a truly evil person.

"I have dealt with field bindweed on a daily basis, and it is one of the most tenacious, vicious, aggressive and downright obnoxious weeds found in northern Utah." says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist.

Field bindweed (Convolvulus arvensis L.) is technically a member of the morning glory family, he explains. However, some morning glory is grown as an attractive annual vine in our area. Field bindweed is not attractive.

Field bindweed is a strong-willed perennial, Goodspeed says. It grows from rhizomes, which are technically underground stems. This gives the plant the ability to move great distances under the ground without being detected. These rhizomes can produce a "new" plant at each node on the stem.

"In layman terms, this means the plant has the ability to send up 1,000 new plants right where you are trying to establish a flower bed or garden," he says. "As if this were not evil enough, this noxious weed also has the ability to produce thousands of seeds. To top it off, these seeds can lay dormant in the soil for up to 50 years before germinating."

Are you scared yet?

"It's impossible to control," Goodspeed concedes. "Well, maybe not impossible, it just seems that way. There are actually some defenses to try to reduce the number of weeds and keep it under control."

There is no easy remedy or quick cure, he says. It may take two or three years of work, but it is worth the time and the effort. The first line of defense is herbicides. Round-up and broadleaf weed killers are the best. These sprays are most effective in the early spring and in the fall. Field bindweed is also susceptible just as it begins to flower. Apply these products according to label instructions.

"All one application accomplishes is just to make the weed mad," Goodspeed adds. "It usually takes two or three applications, spaced a week or two apart, to get its attention. Spring

applications should weaken the plants. Another application may be needed in the fall."

Once the weeds look sick, apply a good deep mulch layer to weaken the plants further, he says. A weed barrier fabric is also effective at slowing it down. It may still find a way to work its way through or around the barrier, but by then its weakened condition will make it a little easier to pull or spray.

One plant that actually out-competes field bindweed is grass, he says. A healthy, vigorous lawn, properly maintained, will crowd out this pushy weed. If field bindweed is a problem in the lawn, proper turf care should eliminate it. Mow the lawn two and a half to three inches tall and fertilize regularly, but be careful not to over-water turf. This only encourages field bindweed and weakens the grass.

"After two or three years of spraying, mulching, pulling and cursing, field bindweed will weaken and become less of a problem," Goodspeed says. "After that, only occasional weeding and control will be needed over the next 45 years."

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