

NOXIOUS WEEDS IN YOUR GARDEN

By Fred Rosenstiel

Of the many weeds in our gardens, which are the ones that are particularly noxious? The answer is obvious: the ones that usurp light, space, water and soil fertility, that spread very fast and are difficult to eradicate. In addition, some weeds can harm desirable plants by strangling, or infesting them with insects or disease; some can even injure people by thorns or poisons. A few weeds are simple parasites on supporting plants, having lost in the course of evolution the capacity of feeding themselves independently.

One should always remember that a weed is “good” or “bad” only for the role we have assigned to it. It is useful to know the principal ways in which weeds found in New York City are objectionable and to mention some of the most noxious ones in each category. While doing so it is important also to mention the more obvious beneficial qualities of these “noxious” weeds. The following is a list of the more objectionable weeds by category.

NOXIOUS WEEDS	OBJECTIONABLE QUALITIES	GOOD QUALITIES
TREES		
Tree of Heaven 'Ailanthus altissima'	Numerous suckers from widespread spread roots exhaust soil	Large older trees are beautiful; can grow where nothing else thrives.
Poplar 'Populus spp.'	Disadvantages similar to Ailanthus; Roots penetrate water pipes and drains	Fast growing for windscreens
WOODY VINES		
Poison Ivy 'Rhus radicana'	Skin irritant; strangles tress	Binds soil, magnificent autumn color.
Japanese Honeysuckle 'Lonicera japonica'	Invasive; can smother other plants	Fragrant blossoms; excellent for combating erosion of steep slopes.
FAST-SPREADING ANNUALS		
Ragweed 'Ambrosia artemisifolia'	Most common cause of hay fever	Improves soil if dug under before setting seed.
Horseweed 'Erigeron canadensis'	Can reach 6'; produces abundant seed over height of 1'	None
Galinsoga 'Galinsoga ciliata'	Extremely prolific in moist soil if allowed to self-sow	None
Crabgrass 'Digitaria sanguinalis'	Needs exposure to sun; stems root where they touch ground	Makes good hay
Bittersweet or Climbing Nightshade 'Solanum dulcamera'	Spreading rootshock; all parts poisonous, especially the berries	Attractive flowers and berries.
Field Bindweed 'Convolvulus arvensis'	Roots must be pulled out, they can be as deep as 20'	White flowers similar Glories

THE CITY LOT

THICKET-FORMING PERENNIALS		
Japanese Knotweed 'Polygonum cuspidatum'	Very difficult to eradicate when established; will penetrate asphalt if unchecked	Oil binder; foot-high young shoots can be cooked as asparagus
Bramble, Blackberry 'Rubus allegheniensis'	Spreading rootstock will transform a sunny patch into an impenetrable thorny thicket in two or three years	Beautiful flowers, edible blackberries
PERENNIALS SPREAD BY ROOTS		
Mugwort 'Artemisia vulgaris'	Fast-spreading, pungent; hard to eradicate	Medicinal use for kidney, bladder trouble; flower spikes for fragrance
Sheep Sorrel 'Rumex acetosella'	Long creeping roots; likes acid, gravelly soil	Sour leaves can be cooked or used as salad. (Beware of excessive oxalic acid.)
Quack grass 'Agropyron repens'	Fast-spreading; very difficult to eradicate (in one season roots can spread 5' or more)	Binds soil; seeds nourish birds
Canada Thistle 'Cirsium arvense'	Spreads by rootstock; one of the most aggressive weeds	Flowers provide nectar for honey; seeds favored by goldfinches
Yellow Wood Sorrel 'Oxalis stricta'	Invades damp garden soil	Edible in small amounts (Oxalic Acid)
Dandelion 'Taraxacum officinale'	Taproot if broken multiplies plant; seeds blow far away	Brilliant yellow flowers; leaves used for culinary purposes
<u>PARASITES</u>		
Dodder 'Cuscuta gronovii'	sucks juices from supporting plants; remove at once often by sacrificing host plant	None
<u>BULBS</u>		
Field Garlic 'Allium vineale'	Very invasive of neglected areas	Substitute for chives