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Weed Control in the Garden

1. Q. I want to grow my own vegetables but every time I try I grow more weeds than vegetables. Is there anything I can spray the ground with before or after planting will prevent weeds and allow vegetables to flourish?

A. Controlling weeds can be one of the most troublesome jobs associated with producing vegetables in a home garden. In this modern day when someone thinks about weed control, he or she usually thinks about chemical weed control. But for the home gardener other "older" methods of control are still the best and cheapest.

Herbicides (chemical weed killers) may be used under certain conditions to control some weeds but there is no herbicide that can be used on all vegetable crops that will control all weeds. The use of herbicides in a home garden requires special planning and careful application.

Most annual weeds can be controlled by cultivation! Annual broadleaf weeds are easily removed while they are in the seedling stage. Cultivations should be made to control each flush of weeds that emerges, usually within a few days after a rain. At this time weed seedlings are easily uprooted.

Weeds should not be allowed to get so large before control measures are taken that their root systems will develop to such an extent that removal is difficult and damaging to adjoining crops. The old saying, "nip it in the bud," certainly applies to weed control.

The first few weeks after vegetables are planted is the most important time to control weeds. After the vegetables get well established and start shading the ground, they become competitive and do a good job of preventing new weeds from becoming established. Mulches of grass clippings, leaves, and other such materials may also be used to help control weeds. In addition, mulches help conserve soil moisture. A good mulch prevents light from reaching the soil surface and prevents weed seedlings from becoming established. Mulches should be several inches thick to accomplish this purpose.

By following good cultural practices and using mulches along with the timely cultivations and hand hoeing, most annual weeds can be controlled without excessive "back-breaking labor."

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