

- Trumpet Vine
- White Snakeroot
- Yarrow

Some of these may also spread by seed.

Plants that spread by seed:

Plants that spread by seeds are usually a little easier to deal with. Remove the bloom (deadhead) before they set seed to reduce self-seeding. Deadheading may also encourage rebloom. Seedlings that sprout are usually easily removed if caught early.

You can also use a pre-emergence herbicide before seeds have germinated. However, this will also inhibit any desired germination, either of seeds you have planted or from plants you do want to reseed.

Almost all plants will set seed - that is the purpose of the flower - but some are more prolific self-seeders or harder to remove than others. A few that may become a problem are garlic chives, northern sea oats, mallow, larkspur, aster, purple coneflower, spiderwort, butterfly weed, coreopsis, dill and fennel.

Removing Aggressive Plants

If you decide you want to remove a plant, it may take a little time and patience. Plants with rhizomes may be difficult to remove physically. Any piece of root left in the ground may regrow. Dig deeply and try to get as much as possible. Repeated attempts may be necessary. Destroy or remove all plant material.

Chemical controls can also be used. Read all label instructions and use as directed. Several attempts may be necessary.

It may take years rather than months or days, but if you are persistent you'll eventually be successful.

This brochure is primarily concerned with perennials and annuals, but shrubs and trees can also spread by seedlings or suckers and become a problem. It's important to do your research before placing any plant in your yard.

For more information on gardening please visit:

<http://web.extension.illinois.edu/state/horticulture/index.php>

or

call University of Illinois Extension
Knox County Office
309-342-5108

Other information brochures can be found online at <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/hkmw/hort.html>

Developed and Written by
Knox County Master Gardeners
University of Illinois Extension
June 2015



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Outsmarting Thugs: Aggressive Plants in the Garden



Garden Tips

from
Knox County
Master Gardeners



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We all want our plants to grow and thrive, but some of them occasionally get carried away. Plants that grow vigorously, overflowing their boundaries and choking out more well-behaved plants, are often referred to as “garden thugs”. A great deal of time and effort can be spent trying to keep these plants under control.

What is a thug to one person can be a delightful and desirable plant to someone else, who may be willing to put up with any extra maintenance to enjoy the plant.

Defining a plant as a thug can also depend on its location. If a plant can be contained in some way or can be given plenty of room to spread, its behavior may not be a problem. Also, growing conditions vary from one garden to another and from one region of the country to another. A plant that is extremely aggressive in one place may struggle to survive in another.

Plants can spread by seed, by rhizomes (underground stems), or by stolons (runners that grow on top of the soil and root when they make contact with the soil). Some spread by more than one method.

Aggressive plants should be distinguished from invasive plants, which are non-native plants that have escaped cultivation and pose a danger to native ecosystems. Invasive plants such as purple loosestrife and Japanese honeysuckle may be well-behaved in the landscape but they have the potential to invade natural areas and choke out native plants. While some aggressive plants have become invasive, most are only a problem for the gardener.

The Positive Side of Thugs

The same traits that make aggressive plants a problem can also make them useful in certain situations. Many are tough and will grow where other plants won't. They can fill a space quickly and inexpensively, cover problem areas, and prevent erosion on steep slopes. They can smother out weeds, and

need less water, fertilizer, protection, and other maintenance. Some can be relatively easily controlled.

Many thugs are interesting and attractive plants, and, planted in the right spot, make welcome additions to the garden.

How to Recognize a Garden Thug

Try to know what you're getting into before you buy or plant. Learning all you can about your potential plant and its growth characteristics can save a lot of time and frustration later. Different varieties of the same plant may behave quite differently - look for sterile hybrids or non-spreading cultivars. However, even this does not guarantee that plants will always behave.

Try to find out what conditions may bring out the aggressive side of a plant. This is one situation where you may not want to give a plant ideal growing conditions. Find out how hard it is to control if it does spread.

Look for certain words in plant descriptions. Phrases such as “vigorous”, “easy to grow”, “fast-grower”, “low-maintenance”, “drought-resistant”, “thrives in tough conditions”, or “quick-spreading groundcover” may indicate a potentially aggressive plant. Groundcovers in general are spreaders but some may be more aggressive than others.

Beware of gardeners bearing gifts. There is a reason people are trying to get rid of pass-along plants. You may well have a place for it but you need to know what to expect. And be honest about a plant's tendencies when you're on the giving end.

Observe your plants after you place them in the garden. Some may take a little while to show their true colors. If they do spread, they will be much easier to control if caught early.

Co-existing with Thugs

If you already have thugs in your garden or you decide you want to grow something despite its potential aggressiveness, here are a few suggestions to make control easier.

Plants that spread by rhizomes or stolons:

With a new plant, careful placement is important.

- Provide plenty of room to expand. Plant in an area well separated from other garden plants or beds.
- Plant where it will be contained, in an actual container, inside barriers sunk in the ground, or bounded by pavement, buildings, lawn, thick shrubbery, etc. Keep in mind that a barrier may slow it down, but in many cases won't stop it forever. Deep roots may eventually find their way under the barrier.
- Consider planting in less than ideal conditions.

After planting, monitor regularly and remove any unwanted parts of the plant. New, less well established roots are much easier to remove. Cutting the plant back hard may also help slow growth. Destroy or remove from garden all plant material - don't just toss it somewhere where it can re-establish and become a problem again.

Here are a few examples that are a problem for many people. Not all varieties are aggressive and your experience may be different.

- Artemisia
- Bee Balm
- Bishop's Weed
- Chameleon Plant
- Creeping Jenny
- Geranium, perennial
- Gooseneck Loosestrife (very aggressive)
- Lamiastrum
- Lily-of-the-Valley
- Mints (very aggressive)
- Obedient Plant
- Ornamental Grasses
- Rudbeckia
- Sedum (ground cover varieties)
- Sweet Woodruff