

Winning Against Weeds

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My three favorite techniques

1. Cover crop/understory

A. Plants are not made to live in a wasteland of isolation but a cacophony of vegetative cooperation!

B. Timing is everything! Main crop needs a chance to “get ahead” of the other plants.

You can do this via seed starting and then transplanting.

C. If the cover crop starts to crowd out the main plants, use a hand scythe or similar tool to cut it back and give the main planting a boost. You may need to do this a few times during the first 8 or so weeks of the season. Generally takes me 10-15 seconds to trim back around a pepper plant.

D. My favorite choice are clovers, especially red clovers

E. The benefits of this approach are many and include

a) Growing your own fertilizer and soil while growing food

b) Shading soil reducing plant stress and moisture loss

c) Increasing habitat for beneficial insects, creatures (frogs, toads, lizards) and pollinators

2. Solarization

Concentrating the energy of the sun to kill off weeds and sterilize weed seeds

Requires sufficient sunny days and warm enough temperatures to be effective

All you need to is some high grade, clear, UV stabilized plastic (greenhouse plastic)

A. Start by cleaning the area thoroughly - we usually do this by a repeated mowing on the lowest deck setting possible. Then we do two walk through to remove any sticks/debris that is a danger to the plastic.

B. Next, make sure the soil is adequately moist. Water if needed!

C. Then, spread the tarp and bury the edges. Especially if the weeds are moderately deep rooted or well established, burying is crucial for success.

D. Allow to sit for anywhere from 4-14 days depending on weather, weed pressure, and other factors.

E. After you pull, don't disturb the soil! Be ready to do a cover crop or mulch or similar soil improver, weed repeller tactic!

3. Mulching -

If weeds can't see the sun or reach the air and light, they may not germinate or if they do, die before they become established. Mulch is one way to help keep weeds at bay.

A. I prefer wood chip, shredded leaf mold, or chopped straw type mulches, with studies showing wood chip mulches have the most benefits.

a) Wood chips, 3-4 inches deep, straw, 4-6 inches deep

b) I don't like using hay - why bring innumerable weed seeds into a place you are trying to make less weedy???

B. Mulches require good timing and sufficient depth to be effective - if you apply too late and weeds are well established, they will grow right through (but be far easier to remove!). If you apply too early, they may cause transplant issues by keeping the soil too cool.

C. Wood chips should be aged before using around plants - See and smell test, if you can see or smell what kind of wood the tree was that the chips were made from, the chips aren't ready to use! Generally takes about 2-4 months for a load of chips to be ready. Longer they age, the faster they will break down and enrich your soil. We often use a well aged layer of chips as a base layer and then add younger, but still aged chips, on top.