WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
KING COUNTY EXTENSION

Community Horticulture Fact Sheet #10

Weed Prevention and Control

A weed is an unwanted or "out of place" plant. Weeds compete for nutrients, space, and sunlight with your edible and ornamental plants. Soil, sunlight and garden spaces don't say "sorry, you can't be here" to undesirable plants, that's the gardener's responsibility. Being able to identify and eliminate weeds from your garden will help your garden to be healthy and productive. Prevention will help to reduce the amount of weeding and hard work for you.

Preventing Weed Problems

- Prepare your garden soil carefully. Provide humus and nutrients for your plants. Healthy plants are more vigorous plants and are less likely to give way to weeds.
- Rotate your food crops to keep them healthy and discourage growth of both weeds and garden pests.
- Plant your vegetables with weeding in mind. Space your plants so that you can weed around them but close enough together so that when they are mature their leaves touch and shade out weed seedlings.
- Keep paths mulched to prevent weed growth. Mulching your growing space will also help to control and prevent weeds. See Fact Sheet #11for information on mulching.
- Don't let weeds go to seed and make problems worse. Remember the saying: "One year, seeds… seven years, weeds."
- Compost weeds carefully. Perennial weeds and weeds that have gone to seed should not be composted unless you produce very hot, "well done" compost so the roots and seeds will be killed by the heat. This is very difficult to do in a home compost pile.
- Keep your garden area clean and free of rubble that is hard to weed around.

Volunteer Plants

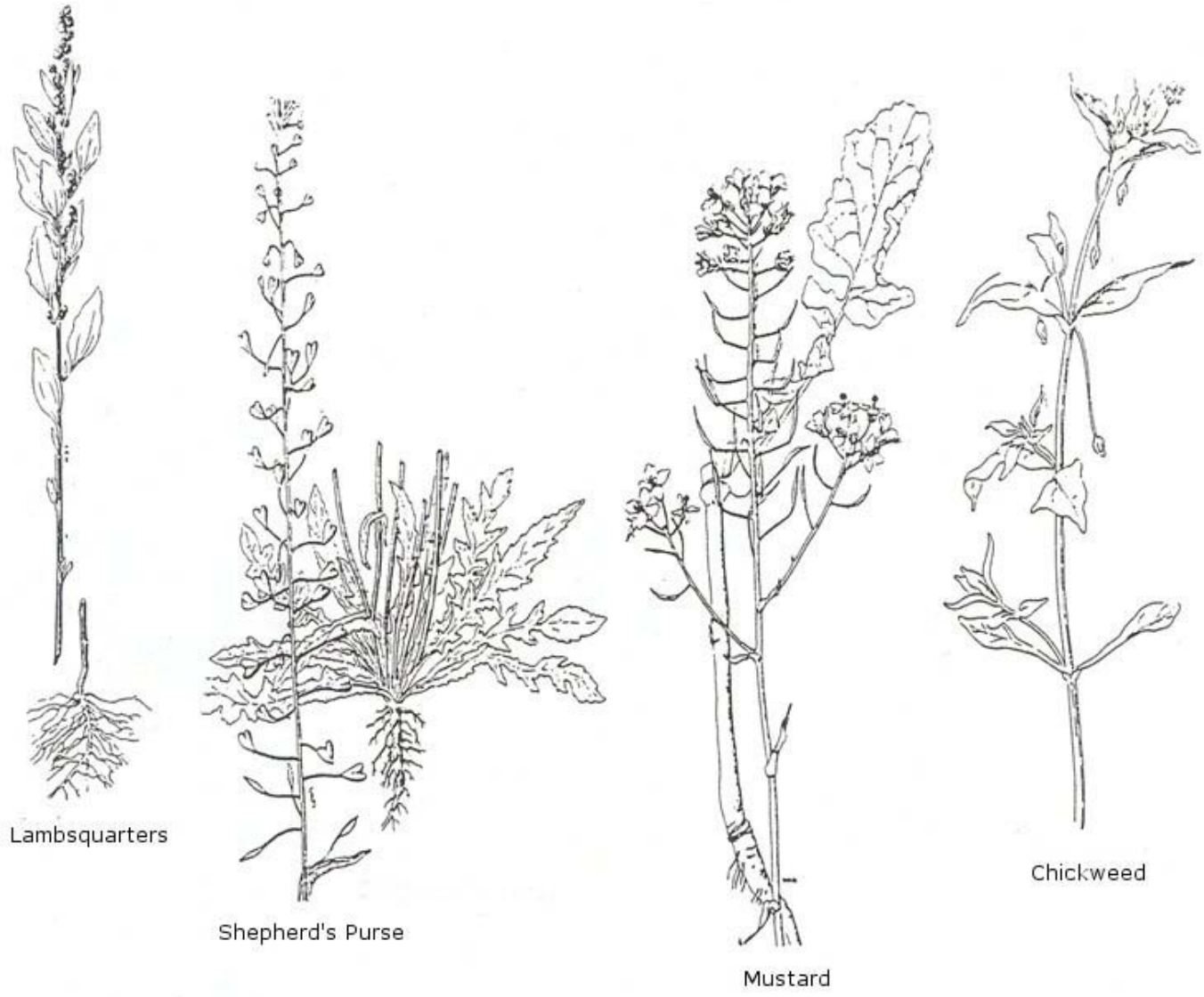
These are plants that you have not planted. They spring up from seeds that drop, fly, or are carried to the garden. A volunteer cucumber or potato in your carrot patch is a weed. Volunteer vegetables often harbor disease and pests as well as use up the space, nutrients, and sunlight needed for the vegetables planted in that area. Often, when volunteer garden plants are cultivated, their production is low and, therefore, not worth the lowered production of your planned vegetable crop. It's easier to tolerate a volunteer ornamental. Is it in a spot where you like it? It is likely to go to seed and create way more volunteers than you care to have?

Annual Weeds

These plants go through their life cycle in one year - they sprout, grow, flower, set seed and die. Some annuals begin their lives in the fall and live through the winter. Other annuals sprout in the spring and set seed at different times until the fall. Annuals usually have shallow root systems. Their control depends on your dedication and persistence. If you weed (hand or hoe) your garden about once a week, these weeds will not become a problem. If you are using a hoe, don't disturb more than the top half-inch of soil. By hoeing weekly, you won't let the weeds flower and spread seeds, so new weeds will be few. Shallow and frequent weeding will not harm the roots of the vegetables or other plants you are protecting.

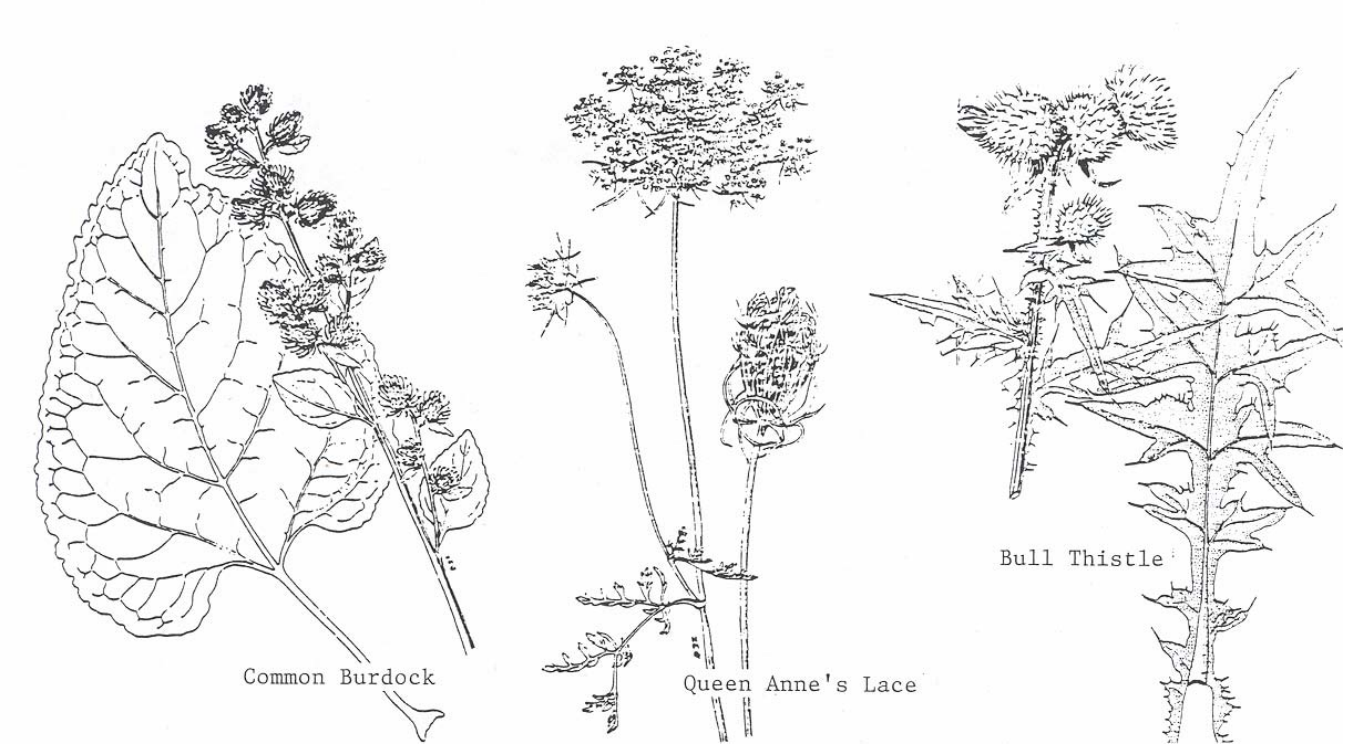
WSU King County Extension Master Gardener Program * 206-205-3122 * 206-296-0952, fax
elaine.anderson@kingcounty.gov * king.wsu.edu/gardening
200 Mill Avenue S, Suite 100 * Renton WA 98057

Some examples of annual weeds are Lambsquarters, Shepherd’s Purse, Field Mustard, and Common Chickweed.



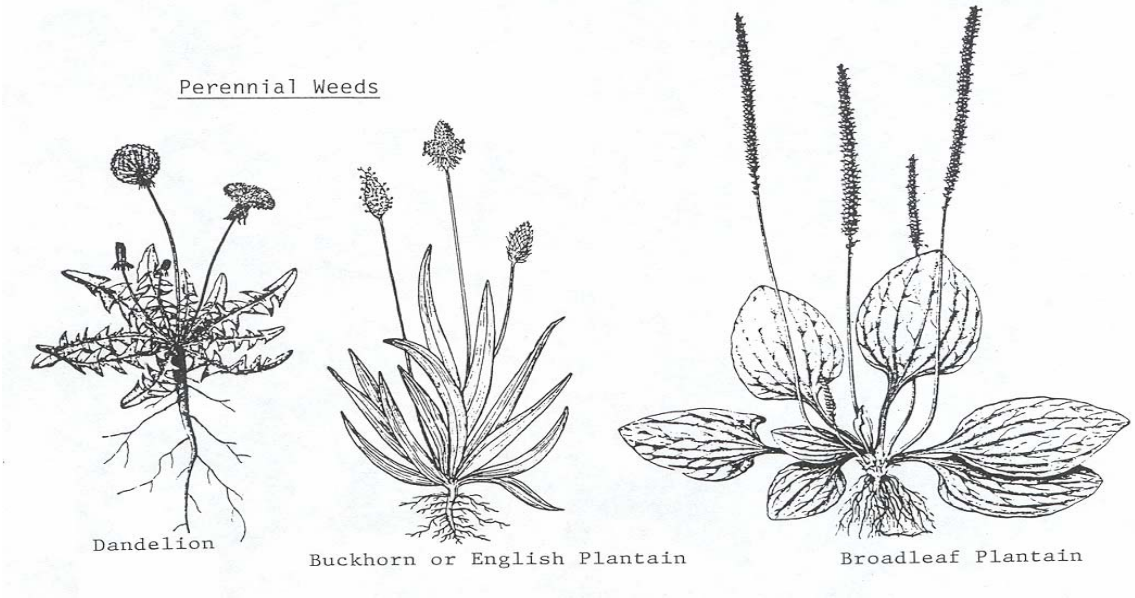
Biennial Weeds

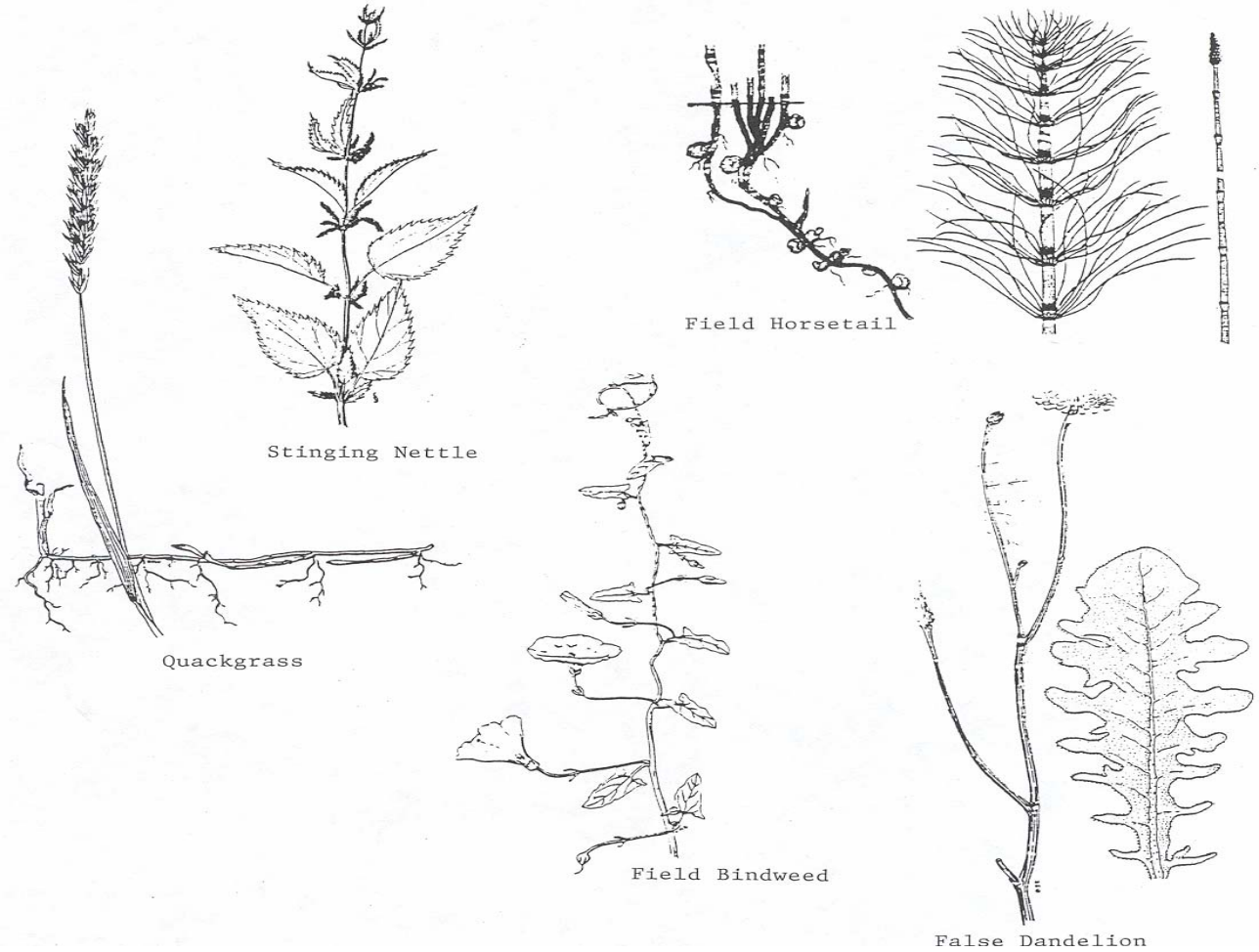
These plants take two years to complete their life cycles. The first year they grow into small plants with large food reserves in their root systems. The second year they flower, form seeds and die. Many biennial weeds send up young shoots from the established plant’s root system. To control them it is important to pull up the whole rootstalk so that resprouting from the roots does not occur. If the root does not come up completely, keep pulling new shoots. Some examples of biennial weeds are Queen Anne’s Lace, Burdock and Bull Thistle. See illustrations below.



Perennial Weeds

These live more than two years. The part above ground may die, but new growth comes from the roots each spring. They also flower and produce seed each year. Perennials usually have deep and extensive root systems that must be entirely removed for control. If a bit of root sprouts, the plant will re-establish itself. You may still be able to establish control if you remove most, but not all, of the root system and regularly pull new sprouts and root bits as they appear. Control of perennial weeds is difficult and requires you to be dedicated and persistent. Examples of perennial weeds are Horsetail, Buckhorn and Broadleaf Plantain, Bindweed (Morning Glory), Stinging Nettle, Quackgrass, Dandelion and False Dandelion.




Stinging Nettle
Field Horsetail
Quackgrass
Field Bindweed
False Dandelion