

The Secret of Easy Weeding

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A simple matter of *where* and *when*

There are three choices in weeding - small, medium, and **large**. The easiest way is to deal with the weeds when they are small. Before we dig into the ways of dealing with small weeds, let's briefly tackle medium and large weeds.

Dealing with large weeds

Pulling up large weeds is not recommended if they are close to your good plants because if their roots are tangled together you may severely damage your good plants. So pulling is limited to medium sized weeds and large weeds that are distant from your good plants. Pulling weeds is slow hard work.

It is faster and safer to cut medium and large weeds at or just below the soil surface. A knife, garden hoe, or wheel hoe can be used on medium and large weeds. Remember that you want to cut the weeds off right at, or slightly below, the soil line. A tool like our [grape hoe](#) works well for large areas and paths, while any small sharp hoe will work well close to your good plants.



If you let your weeds reach the medium to large size, then you will need to keep cutting them back during the entire gardening season. Once the season ends you should dig out the roots of the large weeds, especially perennial weeds.

Small weeds are the best

It is indeed best to manage your garden so that you only have to deal with small weeds. The secret to this has been known to farmers for many years, but rarely used by gardeners. Now that gardeners are kicking the herbicide habit it is time for this weed secret to be shared.

*The secret is knowing **where** weed seeds sprout, and **when** they are easiest to kill.*

First let's talk about the **where**.

0" to 1" deep:

These weed seeds in the top inch of soil are most able to germinate (sprout) and will do so very rapidly.

1" to 2" deep:

The weed seeds at this depth can germinate, but are slow to sprout.

2" to 4" deep:

These weed seeds are mostly dormant and only a very few species will germinate at this depth.

4" and deeper:

All the seeds are dormant. Only bulbs and tubers will sprout and grow at this depth.

Note that seeds germinate best the closer they are to the surface. This is also why some crops, like corn, are planted shallow for quick germination, then later hilled. Hilling is adding soil over the base of a row of crop plants *after* they get tall enough. This protects the roots from drying, and smothers small weeds growing between the crop plants.

Now you need to know **when** weeds are easy to kill.

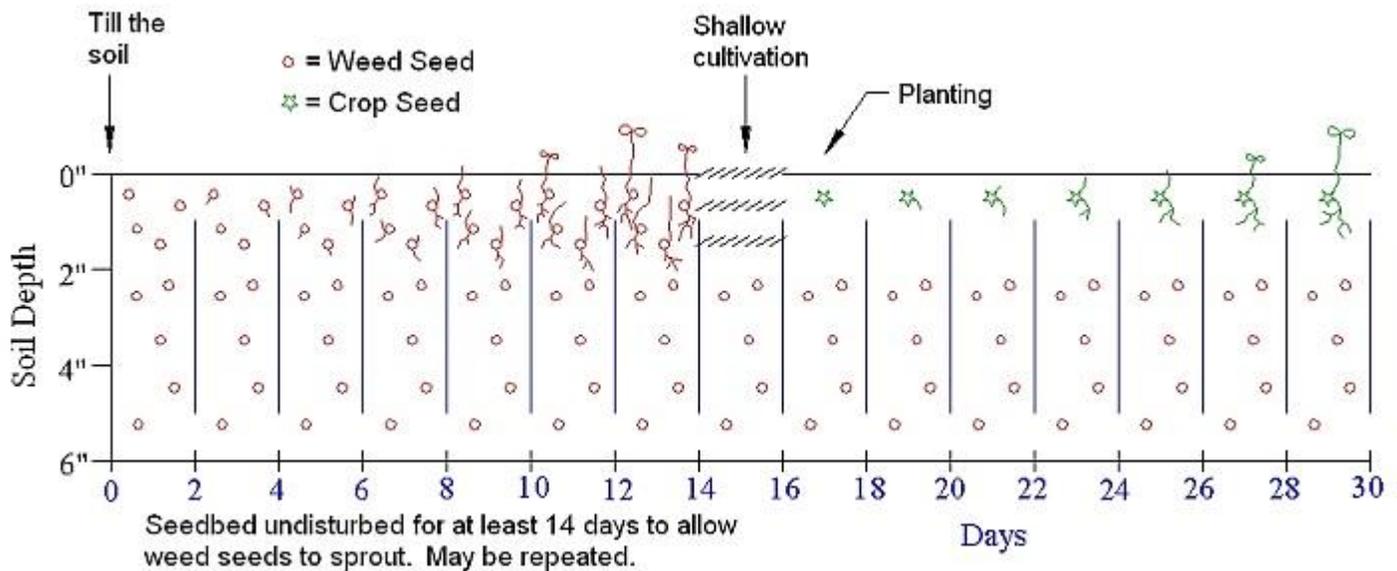
A seed is a biological energy storage device, sort of like a battery. That energy is used to launch the portions of the plant that collect nutrients and energy. First the roots head down for moisture, and then the stalk heads upward for sunlight energy.

The seedling plant has depleted all the energy stored in the seed right about the same time that the first leaves appear. If anything happens to the young plant at this time; if the leaves are removed, if the stem is cut, or if it is buried - there will not be enough energy left in the seed for the plant to recover and it will die. ***The most effective time to weed is when the first leaves appear.***

The secret of easy weed control is combining the knowledge of **where** and **when** into what farmers call the **False Seed Bed** technique.

A False Seed Bed is prepared but un-planted soil that is left alone just long enough to grow a nice batch of very small weeds. Then the soil is weeded very shallowly (1" or less) to kill all the young weeds WITHOUT stirring up any of the deeper dormant weed seeds. Once this shallow weeding has been done, your good seeds are planted in soil that has very few remaining active weed seeds. This is the secret to minimizing your weed problems.

Please study the picture below, and then we will cover the ways of doing this in your garden.



It is important to realize that the 14 days shown between preparing your soil and planting your garden is a **minimum**. Use those first nice days of Spring to prepare your soil and then do the shallow weeding every 14 days or so (depending on dry weather availability) until the time is right for planting.

Do not be an unprepared one-weekend gardener who tills their soil and plants their crops all in the same weekend. A little planning and preparation is required.

The very shallow weeding can be done in small gardens with a small slicing hoe.



Once you begin using the secret of the False Seed Bed technique, and you will hesitate to deeply cultivate your soil to avoid bringing those deeply buried weed seeds up to the surface.