Helpline Happenings March 2025
Spring Weeds
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What is a weed?

According to *Merriam-Webster*:
weed noun

1 a (1) : a plant that is not valued where it is growing and is usually of vigorous growth, especially one that tends to overgrow or choke out more desirable plants.

When is spring? For this article, spring is the period between the end of winter weather and Memorial Day.

Our Helpline clients requested information on the following weeds in 2024:

Hairy bittercress	Boxelder seedling
Indian mock strawberry	Japanese knotweed
Bamboo	Bermuda grass
Ground ivy	Japanese honeysuckle
Lesser celandine	Volunteer trees
Little starwort	Perennial seedlings
Multiflora rose	Garlic mustard
Canadian or Bull thistle	Nimblewill

This article is limited to hairy bittercress, ground ivy vs henbit vs purple deadnettle, and Indian mock strawberry as all these weeds are in my garden, so surely they are in most Mercer County gardens.

Hairy bittercress *(Cardamine hirsuta)*

Hairy bittercress is native to Europe and western Asia. It is a member of the mustard family (Cruciferae) and forms a basal rosette, or a circular cluster of leaves radiating from the stem at ground level. The leaves are variable and pinnately lobed. In the

spring, plants grow rapidly and begin to flower. Small white flowers with 4 petals and 4 sepals are arranged in dense racemes at the end of upright stems. Fruit is a flattened capsule 1.5 to 2.5 cm long called a silique held parallel to the stem. Siliques are explosively dehiscent and shoot seeds up to 10 feet. A similar plant also found in our area is flexuous bittercress *(Cardamine flexuous)* whose flowers have 6 petals and 6 sepals

Hairy Bittercress rosette



Photo by Linda Ward

Hairy Bittercress in flower



Photo by Betty Marose Maryland Extension

Hairy bittercress is a winter annual. It germinates in autumn, grows quickly in the spring, flowering and setting seed before dying in the early summer. Pre-emergent can be applied in late summer. In the spring, hand-pulling before the plant goes to seed is effective. If the plant has taken over large portions of the turf, a broadleaf weed chemical control can be used. Rutgers FS385 lists broadleaf weed chemical control and its effectiveness by weed. To use this document, it is necessary to know that hairy bittercress is in the mustard family.

There has been interesting recent research into how hairy bittercress shoots seeds from the seed capsules. The results of this research have now been published in ”Current Biology” and Phys.org and can be found in these two links:

https://phys.org/news/2024-02-wayside-weed-explosive-hurl-seeds.html

https://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822(24)00096-4

Hairy bittercress seed pods



Photo by Dr. John Meade Rutgers NJAES Cooperative Extension

Indian Mock Strawberry *(Potentilla indica* formerly *Duchesnea indica)*

Indian mock strawberry is a non-native from eastern and southern Asia. It is a low-growing perennial vine with compound leaves consisting of three leaflets. The small yellow flower has 5 petals. The fruit is red with the seeds on the outside sticking up. It spreads horizontally rooting at each node.

It is similar to wild strawberry *(Fragaria virginiana)* however, wild strawberry has white flowers and fruit that hangs down with seeds indented on the outside. Both plants grow in the same conditions.

Indian mock strawberry tolerates shade and close mowing and likes moist areas. By creating an environment for healthy grass, Indian mock strawberry can be discouraged. Hand pulling or using an appropriate weeding tool is good for small infestations. Chemical control includes using a product with one or more of the following active

ingredients (always follow the instructions on the label.): 2, 4-D, MCPP (mecoprop), Dicamba, or Triclopyr. Spot treat weeds with a liquid, selective, postemergent, broadleaf weed killer applied when weeds are actively growing. Do not use products with Dicamba over the root zone of trees and shrubs.



Photo by Betty Marose University of Maryland Extension

Henbit vs Purple Deadnettle vs Ground Ivy

These three - henbit *(Lamium amplexicaule),* purple deadnettle *(Lamium purpureum)*, and ground ivy or creeping Charlie *(Glechoma hederacea)* - are plants that are noticed in spring and are frequently confused. It is important to correctly identify them in order to control them.

Henbit:



Photo by Rutgers Center for Turfgrass Science

Purple Deadnettle:



Photo by Rutgers Center for Turfgrass Science

Ground Ivy:



Photo by Betty Marose – University of Maryland

IDENTIFYING **HENBIT** VS **PURPLE DEADNETTLE** VS **GROUND IVY**:

Plant	Henbit	Purple Deadnettle	Ground Ivy
Life Cycle	winter annual	winter annual	perennial
Flower Color	pink	pink	purplish-blue
Flower Form	long tubular, located at top of stem above leaves	small, located at top of stem above leaves	clusters of 2-3 flowers in upper leaf axil, petals are tubular and 2-lipped
Leaf Color	consistently green with burgundy red outlines	burgundy red near top of stem changing to green further down stem	bright green, persist throughout the winter
Leaf Shape	round, deeply scalloped, not hairy	heart shaped, gently scalloped, hairy	kidney to round, broad teeth on the margins, not hairy
Stem Form	upright, square, deep red, short	upright, square	square, trailing with roots at nodes
Foliage Scent	mild		strong mint

CONTROL RECOMMENDATIONS:

These plants like sparse lawns with open soil. Encouraging a thick healthy lawn is the best control for all three of these plants.

For henbit and purple deadnettle understanding their life cycle is needed for the best control. They germinate in the autumn, grow quickly, flower, set seed, and die before summer so treatments must be timed to coordinate. The following treatments during the year are recommended:

<u>September</u>

Chemical control: apply pre-emergent before germination

Mechanical control: mulch heavily in garden beds

November

Chemical control: after germination use a broadleaf herbicide

Mechanical control: hand pull young plants if practical

Spring

Mechanical controls: pulling individual plants before seed set or mowing larger patches of plants to remove flowers.

Chemical controls: not useful at this time as the plants have usually died back before spring herbicides are applied.

For ground ivy mechanical controls are hand pulling seedling plants making sure to remove all trailing stems, or using a sod lifter or sod cutter to remove more mature, established infestations. Because ground ivy is a perennial that forms thick mats, chemical controls may be necessary. Triclophyr alone works the best (always follow the instructions on the label). Treat in the autumn when temperatures have dropped to the 60s or 70s and there is no rain in the forecast. Take care to spray only the leaves of the ground ivy and not the surrounding plants or the soil so as to protect desirable plants.

Recommendations for hiring a landscaping professional :

Helpline has received several requests for recommendations on who to hire to do landscape work. We can't give clients specific recommendations. However, we can provide Rutgers FS039 "How to Hire a Landscape Maintenance Professional." which provides the clients with the questions to ask so that they can make an informed decision on who to hire.

Rutgers also provides a Rutgers Cooperative Extension Organic Land Care Certificate. which is provided to nurserymen and landscapers who complete a 4-day class to learn organic land management. Those who have received the certificate are listed at https://njaes.Rutgers.edu/organiclandcare/find-a-landscaper .

References

General references

- Neal, J. C., Uva, R. H., DiTomaso, J. M., & DiTommaso, A. (2023). Weeds *of the Northeast 2nd Edition.* Ithica, NY and London, England: Cornell University Press.
- https://njaes.rutgers.edu/fs385/
- https://turf.rutgers.edu/blog/weeds-of-early-spring/

Hairy bittercress references

- https://extension.psu.edu/lawn-and-turfgrass-weeds-hairy-bittercress
- https://extension.umd.edu/resource/hairy-bittercress/

Indian mock strawberry references

- https://extension.umd.edu/resource/indian-mock-strawberry/
- https://extension.umn.edu/identify-invasive-species/mock-strawberry

Henbit, deadnettle, ground ivy references

- https://extension.psu.edu/dead-nettle-henbit-and-ground-ivy-three-look-alike-weeds
- https://extension.psu.edu/lawn-and-turfgrass-weeds-dead-nettle
- https://extension.psu.edu/henbit-a-common-winter-annual
- https://njaes.rutgers.edu/fs1219/
- https://extension.umd.edu/resource/ground-ivy/

Recommendations for hiring a professional

- https://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.php?pid=fs039
- https://njaes.Rutgers.edu/organiclandcare/find-a-landscaper