

# Eradicate weeds from your garden

BY ED HUTCHISON

Special to the Record-Eagle

Weeds get a bad rap, especially in the garden. Indeed, they make the garden look unkempt and they compete with good plants for sun, moisture and nutrients, but they are also very easy to control. Here's a look at the major types of control:

**Mulch** — a two to three-inch blanket of mulch will keep seeds in or on the ground from sprouting. It does this by setting up conditions that are not favorable to germination. Weed seeds that lodge in the upper one inch of the mulch blanket will sprout as conditions are ideal — air movement, moisture and light. Seeds that sprout from within the mulch layer are easily pulled out.

**Mechanical control** — pulling or hoeing weeds is effective, even if the process leaves behind a piece of root that may soon send up new top growth. Several types of hoes are available for this; my favorite is more of an oblong band of steel with one edge serrated. With a push-pull motion, it's easy to get under the top growth and chop it off at soil level. This leaves the roots behind, and depending on the type of weed, may finish it off for good. Even if the weed grows back, this tool is easy to use,

especially if the soil is a bit moist.

**Chemical control** — this is where the broad term "herbicide" comes in. A herbicide can loosely be defined as a material that either prevents weeds from sprouting or kills them after they are up. Quite a few types are available with the most popular being broadleaf weed killer — some formulations control as many as 80 different weeds. These are mostly used in the lawn.

The herbicide most useful and effective in the garden now is one that stops weed seeds from sprouting. "Preen" is a popular brand name and there are generic equivalents for a lot less money. "Preen" comes in a few different formulations, some of which include fertilizer.

The beauty of these materials is they are effective for about 10 weeks, or essentially our entire very short growing season in Michigan. The best time to apply is after your garden has been planted with transplants and after flower and vegetable seeds have sprouted. It would be easier to do it before planting but all the digging and fussing you do would likely bury some of the material, rendering it useless. It is not that big of a deal to sprinkle it on top and rake it in around the plants.

Again, the key: Keep up.

I suspect as long as people have raised plants, they've been confounded by the vigor and "they are everywhere" nature of weeds. In greenhouses and other commercial operations, they can be a real problem. Remedies are available to these folks to essentially eradicate weeds from the soil for that year's crop. For non-commercial types, it's best just to accept the fact that weed seeds are pretty much everywhere there's soil and the best you can do is get the upper hand on them.

When dealing with — and writing about weeds — I am often reminded of the Beal seed study at Michigan State University. It was started in the late 1800s with weed seeds in glass containers filled with moist sand and buried at a secret spot on campus. Some still remain and over the years, the study has found seeds remain viable for scores of years and technically, hundreds of years. All they need are the right conditions of sun, moisture and warmth to sprout — and these are often the very conditions we provide in our gardens, especially when we work the soil.

So please don't look at weeds so mortal enemies. Instead, consider them part of nature that can be easily dealt with.

# Bathroom decor can be fun

BY KT LEESON

Copley News Service

The bathroom is one place where you can really be yourself — with your decor, that is. Most powder rooms are small enough that you can take some personal, decorative chances and if things don't work out, you can always start over without breaking the bank.

Tim Fooks, a kitchen and bath designer for Home Depot in Atlanta, lives by the bold approach when it comes to bathroom redesign. "I love bathrooms," said Fooks, who has a bachelor's degree in architecture and a master's in interior design.

He offers bold advice when it comes to the most basic remodeling step you can take, painting the walls. "Don't be afraid of color," says Fooks, who has done bathrooms in cobalt blue, purple, brown and deep red, to name a few choices.

Fooks remembers one client who was unhappy with his existing yellow and black bathroom. He encouraged him to find a way to complement the colors instead of fighting them. "We ended up using a lot of Toulouse-Lautrec prints that really brought out the yellow. He loved it."

Although many designers recommend lighter colors for smaller rooms, Fooks encourages the opposite. "In a smaller room, like a bath-

room, a dark color makes the walls disappear," he said. "You actually gain space."

As a sales associate for a Lowe's home improvement store in Atlanta, Cherice Forskin helps customers looking for more conservative bathroom remodeling ideas.

"People really seem to be into the textured look of tiles, brushed or chrome finish on faucets and more neutral colors on the walls like beige, tan and green," she said.

Bathroom projects are simple enough for do-it-yourselfers, according to Forskin, but for those who need a little help, Lowe's offers books and how-to clinics.

Many projects don't require a trip to the local home-improvement center, but rather simply a search of your own basement, hope chest or hall closet.

Fooks encourages customers and friends to personalize their bathroom with items that reflect their personalities and interests.

"If you collect things, the bathroom is a fun place to display them," he said.

Fooks has used golf clubs for towel racks, spurs to hold stacked bath towels in place and family photos for wall art.

Fooks once helped redecorate a bathroom for a friend

who used to have horses. "We found some old, black and white photos of horses on the wall," he said.

For a theme, Fooks recommends looking at the mirror and shadow pictures of grandparents or a favorite brooch or piece of jewelry.

As for his own bathroom, Fooks embraces a "vintage" theme, including a purple and gold color scheme. "It just makes the room look wonderful," he said.

Fooks' company, advertising other vintage items, is a surprise to those who goers who, change hands themselves dime. For other toilet apothecary "Bathroom gant," Fooks they're more reflect your

# Fighting mold: Prevention is key to eliminating rot from

BY REGGIE STITELER

Copley News Service

Rain, rain, go away. Come again some other day ... when the deck is sealed, the gutters are cleaned and the back porch addition is completed.

Although water can be the savior to your home's landscape, it also can be a major setback to your remodeling project. What happens if those tarps you put up lose the battle to wind and rain?

Unfortunately, the moisture left behind can team with a little warmth to be an accommodating host to mold and rot. And even if you are not remodeling, water damage can result from a crack in your home's original structure, a burst pipe or by simply forgetting to close a few windows during a heavy storm.

Early recognition is key in preventing extensive structural repair and, believe it or not, health problems.

## Prevention

If there is a crack in your home's structure, water will find it. Because moisture is the first condition listed by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) needed for mold to grow, it's a top priority to keep moisture from seeping into walls, floors and ceilings. An annual check for cracks or leaks in roofing, siding and foundation is a good place to start. Also poke suspicious parts of the wood structure for rot. Water sealants are available for wood structures, such as decks, that are constantly exposed to rain.

Search for clues around your home as to how much damage the average rainstorm has on your house. Warning signs to keep an eye on can be as obvious as rotted windowsills and overflowing gutters or as subtle as small cracks in aluminum siding and water drainage toward, not away from, the foundation. Even when it is not raining, the foundation could be taking a beating from a sprinkler system.

If moisture does find a way to penetrate your home, it commonly finds a dwelling in materials such as wood, gypsum board and acoustic tile that make up a home's interior structure. When moist, these materials become food for the many mold spores floating invisibly through the air. If the

room temperature is warm enough — between 40 and 100 degrees, according to the NAHB — conditions are ripe for mold to thrive.

Keep in mind that some parts of the home attract more moisture than others. This includes two of the most remodeled rooms in the home — the garage and the basement. Preventing moisture buildup in these rooms is doubly important if they have been converted into living space. A simple step to reduce moisture buildup in the cool walls and floors common in these rooms is running a dehumidifier.

According to the NAHB, "During the summer, 60 percent relative humidity or lower probably will prevent condensation and mold growth in most parts of the country."

Other measures include mold filters for air conditioners and furnaces, using the exhaust fan in the kitchen and ventilation fan in the bathroom, area rugs instead of carpeting, and dusting and vacuuming often to prevent mold from forming.

## Repairs

The NAHB gives mold between 24 and 48 hours to

appear after water damage has occurred, so action should be taken within that window of time. Water-damaged areas should be searched for superficial black spots and the musty odor mold produces. Damaged wood, carpeting or walls must be either cleaned and dried or completely removed and replaced.

Mold or fungus living on an edge or small section of a building material such as wood may be removed by shaving, sanding or scrubbing. Otherwise, a mixture of chlorine bleach, detergent and water removes mold from most areas.

If removal of rotted or moldy wood leaves behind an uneven finish, many patching products and putties are available to regain the original appearance. Be sure to select a type with a high resistance to water to keep the damage from recurring. After these products are applied, they usually can be sanded to regain a smooth, level texture. Many are designed to be painted to match the accompanying structure. If a section of the structure is completely overrun by either rot or mold, it is usually wise to

replace the entire piece.

As for any mold-affected fabrics, many mildewcides and antimicrobials are on the market to choose from. These products are specifically made to kill mold spores, bacteria and other invisible organisms that have taken residence in carpeting, upholstery and curtains. Choices vary, from special cleaning powders to sprays. Be sure to thoroughly read the instructions for all cleaning and repairing products for safety precautions.

## Health

Allergy symptoms are another sign mold could be growing in your home.

According to the NAHB, "Some people experience little or no reaction from high levels of exposure to mold spores. But other people exposed to low levels can have allergic responses, including asthma, stuffy or runny noses, eye irritation,

fever, wheezing, inflammation in the lungs, and skin rashes."

Today's air purifiers use technology that dramatically reduces the amount of mold spores and other invisible bacteria the occur in the home.

As with most preventive

tactics in life, prevention is key in preventing mold and rot that result in damage. Just a little effort and money can serve all the mold and money needed to make it today.

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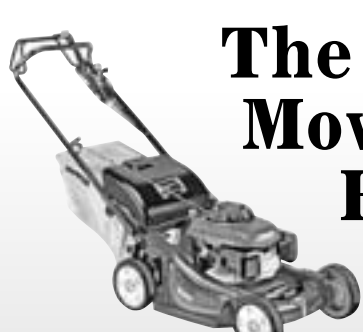
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