

# Healthy Choices to Control Lawn and Garden Pests

## BROADLEAF WEEDS (DANDELIONS, CLOVER, BUTTERCUP, PLANTAIN)

### What Do They Look Like?

#### Dandelion (see illustration on right)

- Long, deeply-toothed, lance-shaped leaves, with a long tap root
- Bright yellow flowers, which turn into white puffy seed heads that spread in the wind

#### Clover

- Many different types. All have characteristic three oval-shaped leaflets, finely toothed, with prominent veins
- May have yellow, white or pink flowers
- Holds nitrogen in its roots. That's why clover appears green in areas where other plants turn yellow

#### Buttercup

- Leaves have three lobes, deeply toothed
- Distinct yellow flowers, with five shiny petals
- Has a creeping growth habit

#### Plantain

- Smooth, oval leaf blades, 5 – 15 cm long
- Leaf veins are prominent and converge at the leaf stem with 5 – 7 “ribs” that parallel the leaf edges
- Long dark cylinder-like flower head on a straight, stiff stem
- Usually form dense clumps of individual plants

### Where Do I Find It?

- Common in lawns and gardens
- These plants are favourites of bees and other pollinators



### Broadleaf Weed Life Cycle

- Broadleaf weeds are perennials, which means they live for more than one year; the tops may die back but the roots persist
- These weeds produce large number of seeds capable of dispersing over great distances

### Are Aphids Really A Problem?

- While damage is basically aesthetic, large numbers of weeds indicate problems such as low fertility, compacted soil, poor drainage, and excessively dry or waterlogged conditions
- Many weeds are useful, providing food and shelter for beneficial insects and bees
- Weeds prevent soil erosion, stabilize banks, aerate heavy soils and help to break up hard-pan layers
- When to control broadleaf weeds is a personal choice that differs from individual to individual. If you know that at a certain point you will want to control the weeds, it's better to start sooner than later

## What Can I Do? Non-Pesticide Treatments

- Manually remove weeds with as much of the root as possible. Remove weeds in the spring when the soil is moist and before seeds are formed; garden centres carry a number of handy tools for this job
- If weeds are in a garden area, use a hoe and then apply an organic mulch or compost to prevent seeds from establishing
- Proper lawn care is the most effective method of controlling weeds:

**Lawn mowing:** Mow high and use sharp blades (maintain ideal grass height of 6 - 8 cm that shades the soil, prevents water evaporation and allows the grass to better compete with the weeds). Longer grass generally means a healthier, more pest-resistant lawn. Mow often enough so that no more than 1/3 of the grass blades is removed each time you cut

**Nutrients:** Use a mulching or hand mower to leave your grass clippings on your lawn (called “grasscycling”). Grass clippings can supply 25 per cent of your lawn’s fertilizer needs every time you mow. Make sure your lawn has an adequate balance of nutrients. Low pH or a lack of essential nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium can weaken turf. Apply organic mulches or compost to add nutrients. To maintain soil pH between 6.0 and 7.0, add lime to raise pH, and peat moss or sulphur to lower it

**Watering:** Water deeply and infrequently to encourage deep roots. Water early in the day and ensure that water reaches the root zone.

Overwatering may encourage some weeds such as buttercups

**Aeration:** Aerate compacted or heavy clay soils every year or two. Mechanical aerators are useful for large areas and a garden fork can be used for small areas

**Thatch control:** Thatch is the dead grass that builds up on the surface of your lawn. A 1-cm layer of thatch can be beneficial but thicker thatch should be removed

## How Can I Prevent It Next Year?

- See What Can I Do?
- Ensure you have the best grass and soil for the area and climate (adequate drainage and sufficient organic matter content are just as important for lawns as gardens)
- Plant a variety of grasses that can tolerate a range of growing conditions for both sun and shade
- Aerate and top dress with finely screened compost and sand in the spring or fall (for proper drainage and root development)
- Sparse or patchy lawns may be over seeded with turfgrass mixtures during winter or early spring
- Consider alternatives to grass, such as other ground covers, paving stones, gravel paths and bark mulch

