

Oxalis: It's pretty, but is it nice?

The Garden of the Sun is a beautiful demonstration garden maintained by Master Gardeners of Fresno and Madera Counties. During the recent Tomato and Salsa [tasting] festival held there, plants were sold. The number one plant sold at the plant sale was Oxalis.

Oxalis is a weed.

Oxalis is an attractive clover like perennial. The leaves and flowers vary in size and color. Some varieties grow from bulbs, some rhizomes. The purple-leafed variety, *O. corniculata*, is considered the most aggressive spreader.

I have no doubt that Oxalis is a spreader. My lawn is full of the small purple leafed volunteer type. Ornamental varieties can spread to become aggressive weeds.

Here in Madera, I am also admitting to harboring an ornamental type similar to the kinds sold at the festival. It is best known as a Shamrock. Its large round leaflets might seem to go well in my fern bed and it provides a nice backdrop to the tulips that bloom there in the spring. It thrives well under the sprinkler spray but knowing what I know about its habits I am ambivalent about whether or not I should let it live.

The good news is that it is located in a plant bed isolated from all my other plant beds. Frankly, the plant appears so well established I am reluctant to do anything about, yet, except when it occasionally jumps out of the bed and onto the lawn. When it behaves this way, I pounce on it and pull it up by hand.

Conversely, if you have an appetite to get rid of Oxalis or perhaps its relative Bermuda Buttercup, what can you do?

First of all, identify any weed of concern using a weed identification book, preferably one that has colored pictures. You can also bring a whole plant specimen to the Agricultural Extension office in Madera, preferably on Monday when a Master Gardener is in the office and your specimen is fresh.

Next, study the weeds behavior and become familiar with its growth cycle. This information becomes useful in its treatment.

In regard to its management, University of California recommends removing established plants, Oxalis or its relative Bermuda Buttercup, to control germination. Seedlings can be controlled by continual hand-weeding or by the use of pre-emergent (applied in the spring) herbicides.

Burying seeds or covering them with mulch to block their exposure to light prevents germination and controls seedlings in planting beds. Unfortunately, it is not a feasible

method for lawns. (From U.C. Pest Notes entitled Annual Bluegrass available at Madera Extension Office.)

Or, you can allow it to take over the world—one lawn at a time.

The Garden of the Sun is located at 1944 N. Winery in Fresno. For plant related information see <http://mgfresno.ucdavis.edu>. A variety of low cost gardening and horticulture classes are offered to the public at that location or through Adult Education in Madera.