

GROWING GARDENERS

GARDEN NEWSLETTER FOR MEDICINE HAT & AREA - JUNE 2023

JUNE IN THE GARDEN

BY GENEVIEVE (CFCA GARDEN PROGRAM COORDINATOR)

The garden season is now well underway! Sweet asparagus spears, tender greens, early herbs and crispy radishes are making appearances in kitchens and markets around town. For those of us getting a bit of a late start this year, rest assured that there is still time to plant seeds and transplant seedlings!

In this issue, we are excited to launch a new series. Based on integrated pest management (IPM), **In The Weeds** aims to support gardeners to make ecologically-sound and appropriate decisions when unwanted plants start popping. Anyone growing brassicas (radish, kale, cabbage, mustard, etc) noticing flea beetle damage this season will want to check out our **Insect Insights** article.

The Growing Gardeners newsletter aims to support local gardeners like you! If there is something you'd like us to include, or you have a burning gardening question, please reach out by email to cfcagarden@gmail.com.

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"I GROW PLANTS FOR MANY REASONS: TO PLEASE MY EYE OR TO PLEASE MY SOUL, TO CHALLENGE THE ELEMENTS OR TO CHALLENGE MY PATIENCE, FOR NOVELTY OR FOR NOSTALGIA, BUT MOSTLY FOR THE JOY IN SEEING THEM GROW."

DAVID HOBSON

SEEDS TO PLANT IN JUNE

- Arugula
- Beets
- Broad Beans
- Bush + Pole Beans
- Cabbage
- Collards
- Corn
- Cucumbers
- Endive/Radicchio
- Kale
- Kohlrabi
- Lettuce
- Mustard Greens
- Rutabaga
- Swiss Chard
- Dill
- Mint
- Oregano

LOCAL INVASIVE WEED REMOVAL EVENT

Join our friends with the Grasslands Naturalists for a neighborhood walk to help remove invasive Hoary Cress (see Weed of the Month, p. 2) that are threatening our precious native plant species.

Date/Time: June 14th, 2023, 9am

Meeting Place: Bottom of the Tepee Trail

Access: Park at either the Tepee parking lot or in Kin Coulee in the lot nearest to the HWY 1 pedestrian underpass. Walk the trail to the bottom of the Tepee Trail.

Note: Wear suitable footwear for walking off-trail and gloves for handling weeds (optional).





IN THE WEEDS PART 1: UNDERSTANDING



It is easy to get stuck in the weeds when unwanted plants start popping up in our carefully planted gardens. A good weed strategy includes understanding, prevention, monitoring, and controlling weeds while protecting our health, the environment and our pocketbooks. In Part 1 of our weed management series, we are looking at understanding the weeds we might find in our gardens here in Medicine Hat.

If we define a weed as any plant growing where it is not wanted, it might seem like a waste of effort to learn about them. But in working to understand weeds, we gain knowledge and skills that make us better gardeners who can deal with our growing challenges in realistic, effective and practical ways.

WHO

In order to become acquainted with our weeds, we need to know who they are. This is an excellent opportunity to practice plant identification skills by consulting books, websites, apps or fellow gardeners. While flowering plants are easiest to identify, learning to recognize weed seedlings means we can deal with them sooner, before they get a chance to settle into the soil. On page 4 of this newsletter we share some helpful resources for identifying and dealing with weeds.

HOW

Weeds are masters of reproduction. Once we have a name for the weed that we are dealing with, we can find out how it spreads. Some weeds produce tens of thousands of seeds in a single season! Others spread via rhizomes, underground plant stems that can grow new roots and shoots at every node. The really bothersome weeds can do both! To figure out the best method for controlling a weed, and when to do it, depends on this answer.

WHEN

A plant's life cycle starts when a seed germinates. Most will grow stems and leaves, produce flowers and seeds, and will eventually die. For annual plants, the cycle lasts less than 1 year. Biennial plants take 2 years to complete their life cycle. Perennial plants continue to grow for more than 2 years. Shorter lived weeds tend to be easier to deal with, especially before they form seeds.

WHAT

In Alberta, some weeds are regulated. Gardeners must take appropriate action to control or destroy these weeds if found in our gardens.

Prohibited Noxious weeds "pose a serious threat as they spread rapidly and are highly competitive."

Action required: Must be destroyed.

Examples: purple loosestrife, Himalayan balsam, tansy ragwort

Noxious weeds "have the ability to spread rapidly, cause severe crop losses and economic hardship."

Action required: Must be controlled.

Examples: Canada thistle, creeping bellflower, field bindweed

Nuisance weeds are troublesome, undesirable plants.

Action required: Not provincially regulated.

Examples: chickweed, dandelion, lamb's quarter, purslane

WEED OF THE MONTH

HOARY CRESS

Lepidium spp. Provincial Designation Noxious



Hoary Cress is of the Brassicaceae (Mustard) family. There are 3 similar species are listed under the Weed Control Act which includes: Globe podded (*Lepidium appelianum*), Lens podded (*Lepidium chalepense*), and Heart podded (*Lepidium draba*). These species may also be known as Whitetop, Peppergrass, Pepperweed. Introduced from western Asia.

CONCERN Can form large infestations that can displace native species and reduce grazing quality.

SIMILAR SPECIES Perennial Pepper Grass.

LIFE CYCLE Creeping perennial.

CONTROL Herbicide only, cultivation or mowing may increase populations.

IDENTIFICATION

FLOWER Numerous white flowers with 4 petals borne on 1cm long stalk. Dense clusters create a white, flat-top appearance.

LEAVES Blue green to gray green leaves are alternate, covered with soft white hairs, and lance to arrow head shaped. leaves clasping stem, basal leaves stalked.

STEMS Up to 60cm tall, form large dense colonies.

ROOT Aggressive, rhizomatous, deep.

SEED/FRUIT Pods, up to 3500 seeds per plant, viable for several years.

Source: Wheatland County. (2017). Identification Guide for Alberta Invasive Plants. https://www.edmonton.ca/public-files/assets/document?path=pdf/weed_identification_book.pdf



INSECT INSIGHTS: FLEA BEETLES



There are no gardens that are completely free of insects, and that is a good thing! Many insects are beneficial to gardens, helping with pollination or munching on other pests. Less than 1% of insects can be considered garden pests, but sometimes it seems like those few troublemakers are ganging up to decimate our plants. When it comes to crucifer flea beetles (*Phyllotreta cruciferae*) this may not be far from the truth.

The crucifer flea beetle was introduced from Europe in the early 1920s and is now abundant anywhere canola is grown in Canada (that's us!). Because Medicine Hat is surrounded by canola fields, the population of flea beetles is elevated, and gardeners may begin to see signs of flea beetle activity when air temperature reaches 14 degrees C. As the beetles feed on their host plants (cabbage, caper, nasturtium, and marshflower families) they chew small holes in the leaves. The plant tissue surrounding the holes dries out, giving the appearance of number of shotgun holes in the leaves (see header image above), and can lead to stunted growth, lower crop yield, reduced quality and even seedling death.

Flea beetles live on host plants, or in the soil nearby, preferring to emerge when weather is warm and dry. The majority of damage occurs between May and June. Under favorable conditions, a flea beetle can travel up to 1 km using both jumping and flying. If flea beetle presence is more or less inevitable throughout the prairies, is there any hope for growing delicious veggies like radishes, broccoli, and kale?

There are a few strategies and tools to minimize damage and protect our crops:

- Covering plants with floating row cover creates a physical barrier to protect crops (see photo inset).
- Direct seeded crops see more damage than transplants. Give cabbage family plants a fighting chance by starting them indoors and waiting to plant outside after the first flea beetles are gone.
- Cover crops and mulches can be used to make the soil around host plants less desirable for laying eggs.
- It might sound weird, but we love using a shop vac to suck up flea beetles. Put a little water in the empty vacuum cannister to prevent them from jumping out, find a leaf covered in flea beetles and suck them up!

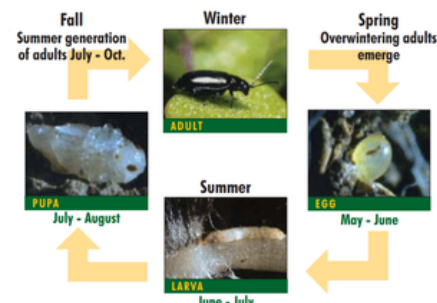


There are other recommendations to deal with flea beetles that are missing from this list for good reasons.

- Planting a trap crop lures insect pests away from the main crop but must be planted at least 3 meters away from the main crop. Most gardeners do not have the space for this to be effective.
- We do not recommend using insecticides because flea beetles have hard protective shells that few insecticides can penetrate.
- Some native insects play a role in controlling the flea beetle population, so we do not encourage spraying our gardens with insecticides that can harm them.

Remember, plants that are healthy and well-watered are less likely to be attacked and damaged by insect pests.

LIFE CYCLE



KNODEL & OLSON. (2002). CRUCIFER FLEA BEETLE BIOLOGY AND INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT IN CANOLA [DIAGRAM]. NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY. [HTTPS://AGRESEARCH.MONTANA.EDU/WTARC/PRODUCERINFO/ENTOMOLOGY-INSECT-ECOLOGY/CANOLA/FLEABEETLES/NDFSUFACTSHEET.PDF](https://agresearch.montana.edu/wtarc/producerinfo/entomology-insect-ecology/canola/flea-beetles/ndfsufactsheet.pdf)

EVENTS

FARMER'S MARKET @ CYPRESS CENTRE

JUNE 3, 10, 17, 24. 9 AM -1 PM

SEAWA RIPARIAN TOUR

JUNE 10, 9 AM -12 PM
CONNAUGHT POND

NATURE WALK + INVASIVE WEED PULLING

JUNE 14, 9 AM
SEE PAGE 2 (ABOVE) FOR DETAILS

HORT ASSOCIATION ANNUAL BBQ

JUNE 12TH, 5:30 PM
LION'S PARK, REDCLIFF

SOUTH EASTERN ALBERTA WATERSHED ALLIANCE AGM

JUNE 22, 1-4 PM
COURTYARD ROOM @ MHC

GRASSLANDS NATURALISTS BIRDING + FLOWER FIELD TRIP

JUNE 24, 7 AM
CYPRESS HILLS

HORT ASSOCIATION GARDEN TOUR

SUNDAY, JULY 16



GROWING GARDENERS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Did you know that there is a free weekly garden club in Medicine Hat? Starting in May, join us in the community garden behind the Root Cellar (440 Maple Ave SE) every Wednesday at 7pm for Growing Gardeners Education Program. Each session covers a different garden-related topic while incorporating hands-on garden learning. Registration is not required and children are welcome so long as they are accompanied by an adult guardian. Watch our social media pages to get updates about topics and information about what to bring (when needed). As we meet outside, adverse weather may force us to cancel or move sessions around. For more information, follow us on social media or email CFCAGarden@gmail.com.

JUNE GARDEN CLUB TOPICS

MAY 31 WEEDS FIELD TRIP	DIFFERENT VENUE THIS WEEK! We will look at some common local weeds. How to identify, when to worry, which ones can be eaten and best practices for removal.
JUNE 7 UNDERSTANDING INSECTS	Who is eating that plant? Bugs to love and protect. The circle of (insect) life. Controlling pest populations.
JUNE 14 INTRO TO PLANT IDENTIFICATION	Plant parts, terminology, and tools for figuring out how to identify plants both in our gardens and elsewhere.
JUNE 21 SOIL: PART 1	The Underground Ecosystem: What is it made of, who is living there and how to do simple at-home soil tests.
JUNE 28 WHAT PLANTS GRAVE	Building healthy soils, when and how to fertilize, pros and cons of manure + compost.

GARDEN RESOURCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Did you know that the Government of Alberta has some handy weed identification guides? Check these out!

Weed Seedling Identification Guide (10\$ shipping included)
<https://www.agric.gov.ab.ca/app08/showpublications>

Identification Guide for Alberta Invasive Plants (free PDF)
https://aaaf.ab.ca/uploads/pdf/Weed_ID_Guide_2017.pdf

IF YOU GROW IT, SHOW IT!

While the Better Living & Horticulture Show, part of the MH Stampede, is still a month away (July 24-26), we want to encourage our readers to start thinking about this exciting opportunity to showcase the fruits of their labour!



People are encouraged to enter their homegrown vegetables, fruits, fresh flowers, canning, or baking made from scratch in the competition.

For more information, see the Better Living & Horticulture Show brochure:
<https://www.mhstampede.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/booklet2023.pdf>

ABOUT COMMUNITY FOOD CONNECTIONS ASSOCIATION (CFCA)

Community Food Connections Association is non-profit organization based in Medicine Hat, Alberta. Launched in 2003, we have been working to support food security in the community through education, programming, partnerships and policy support for improvements in food, nutrition, health and local agriculture.

Our programs include the Good Food Club, Community Kitchens, the Local Food & Producers Directory, Medicine Hat Community Gardens, and Growing Gardeners Weekly Garden Club. To find out more, head over to our website or social media accounts.

