

A Guide to Cripsey Meadow Weeds and How to Tackle Them

Bindweed Bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*) – a herbaceous perennial climber that will not only take over your plot, but also “strangle” other plants if left to it. It has shallow, fleshy roots that spreads very quickly through the soil, and can go down up to 5 meters. Any bit of roots left while trying to eradicate the plant can grow into a new plant, and it can end up on your plot hidden in the roots of new plants, manure or soil.

Cultural control Bindweed is extremely difficult to control organically - but with a couple of years persistent digging and hoeing it is possible to get rid of the plant. In saying that, though, it will readily spread from neighbouring plots if left untreated. The first step in treating bindweed is to get as much of the root system out as possible while digging your plot in autumn/winter. Next you must consistently hoe out any shoots that try to come out in summer, as this will significantly weaken the roots for the coming season. It is most problematic when in perennial planting. More plots have more permanent planting so it must be persistently managed so that it does not spread to neighbours.

Chemical control Bindweed is effectively and easily treated with a systemic glyphosate based weedkiller, such as roundup. The problem lies in not killing other plants in the process. To avoid any other plants being affected by the weedkiller, make sure there's no chance of the spray drifting onto them - or apply the weedkiller onto the leaves of the bindweed - using a paintbrush.



Couch or Twitch grass (*Elymus repens*)

more due to how common it is than how difficult it is to control. It's a rather invasive weed that, if not controlled, quickly will take over a large area. Couch grass looks like any other tuft of grass, but underground it spreads by rhizomes and long white spaghetti-like stems, which will produce new shoots, from where new tufts will grow. The new tufts will form their own stems and rhizomes - and the circle is complete! On an open plot couch grass doesn't really pose much of a problem. If, however, its roots spread and gets itself entangled in the root balls of fruit bushes and shrubs on your plot - you have a problem!

Cultural control -Digging out couch grass is possible - but it's a bit of a task if it's widely spread. While digging, make sure to remove every bit of root you find, to avoid the couch grass re-growing and the problem worsening. New shoots of grass should be dug out immediately - removing all roots. While digging out the roots - use a fork rather than a spade - to avoid cutting the roots. Dug-out roots should be burned or disposed of to avoid them re-growing. Never throw them on your compost heap! They can be rendered safe by sealing in a black bag with some water and leaving for a few months in the sun. After they have broken down they are safe to add to the compost heap.

Chemical control Glyphosate based weedkillers like Roundup are extremely effective against even heavy infestations of couch grass, and (if used correctly) should kill off the lot in just one application. Leave weedkiller to do its job for about 3 weeks, and promptly treat



any new grass that may appear in this period of time. The treated area should not be cultivated until the grass has died back completely.

Bramble The omnipresent bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*) is a nuisance perennial weed that spreads in two ways - through its root network or by layering new shoots from its long stems. It doesn't present much of a problem if you have got one on your plot. If, however, you have inherited an overgrown plot with a patch of brambles on it, you're in for a bit of a fight, as they can soon take over uncontrolled areas. We have eliminated vast amounts of this form Cripsey meadow and now have strict rules to control it on boundaries so that we do not have to do this again. If well managed it is allowed on headlands and within a plot well away from a boundary. Its berries are excellent for making jam and attracting wildlife.

Cultural control Bramble isn't too hard to remove by hand if you have got one or two of them. The real problems arise if they have been allowed to spread or the root is not on your plot. Start out by cutting all stems back to the roots - and dispose of them - preferably by burning them. Then - using a fork - try to lift the entire root ball. Do not use a spade for this, as the bramble will re-shoot from any roots cut through by the blade. Again - get rid of the roots - dry and burn.

Chemical control When going down the chemical route you still have to cut back all stems and dispose of them. This is to prevent the bramble from continuing to spread via layering itself while the chemicals do their work, and to limit your use of the chemicals to a smaller area. Once cut back treat new growth as and when it emerges. While a glyphosate based weedkiller like roundup will do the job (it usually requires more than one or two treatments), other weedkillers (brushwood type) are more efficient. The advantages with using the glyphosate based weedkillers is that they are readily available and that they don't leave residues in the soil. The brushwood weedkillers are harder to get hold of - and will linger in the soil for around 6-8 weeks.

Horsetail and Ground Elder were quite limited to a few areas but began to increase along fence lines and in boundaries, fruit areas and paths where they are not regularly cultivated, weeded, managed or cut. These weeds can have dreadful consequences for the site as they have deep roots which can travel distances. Members must be aware and work persistently to remove them. They are difficult to dig out as they have a resilient root structure but constant mowing/weeding will eventually work to limit them. Unfortunately we now regularly have to reclaim plots which even after just a few years have significant bramble boundaries, ground elder and bindweed.



Ground elder (Ground elder has apple-green, lobed leaves and flat heads of cream-white flowers in summer. It spreads rapidly and can creep between cultivated plants. It has large clumps of foliage. It dies down below ground in winter, which means it's difficult to spot when cultivating the soil. However, it's capable of re-growing from fragments of root, making it a particularly virulent plant. It is rampant and

competes with cultivated plants for light, water and nutrients.

Organic Solution -In existing cultivated areas it's best tackled by digging up the cultivated plants and washing their roots to tease out the cream-white roots of ground elder. Regular cutting of the foliage, just below ground level with a hoe will gradually weaken the plant, but this needs to be done every 7-10 days, as soon as re..growth appears. Alternatively, fork through the soil every 10 to 14 days, removing every piece of ground elder root that's found.

Chemical - Apply systemic weed killer to the foliage as soon as it appears in spring. Re-apply throughout the growing season at four- to six-week intervals, or as soon as any re-growth appears. One plot holder has had more success with vinegar directly applied to the roots.

Field Horsetail Horsetail or Mare's Tail (*Equisetum arvense*) is one of the ploholders (or gardeners in general) worst nightmares.

Horsetail is a deep rooted herbaceous weed with tough, light brown or bright green shoots that resemble pine needles. It dies back completely in winter. It flourishes on undisturbed damp ground. Time to act spring, summer, autumn

It's quite a common weed to be found on a lot of plots - seemingly one that you have to learn to live with - since it's more than difficult to eradicate. Horsetail mainly spread through its creeping underground rhizomes, which can go down as far as 1.5 metres. The growth starts out in spring as asparagus-like shoots, and later in the season develops into fir-tree like plants as shown on the picture. The top growth dies back in winter.



Cultural control The rhizomes can be forked out of the top layers of soil, but regrowth is inevitable. Shallow weeding should be avoided, as it worsens the problem. The best solution is to remove rhizomes by digging as deeply as possible but the deep roots of established horsetail colonies will re-grow. Regularly removing the shoots and rhizomes as soon as they appear will weaken the plants, but total eradication requires determination over a number of years. Where horsetail is growing in grass, regular close mowing will cause it to die off, although it may persist in borders at the edge of lawns and this can send it onto another plot!. Black polyethylene or woven sheeting can be used to suppress weeds as can straw, bark chippings, grass clipping and composted organic materials. These can lock up nitrogen as they decompose. Loose materials need to be applied as a substantial layer, at least $\frac{3}{4}$ but these steps are unlikely to remove these weeds within existing planted areas. By regularly removing new shoots as soon as they appear above ground, the plants seem to weaken, and infestation can be reduced quite a lot over a couple of seasons.

Chemical control Horsetail is resistant to most weedkillers - at least those that can be used anywhere near other plants and produce. This is due to the plants having an outer cuticle that protects it against penetration. Some success can be achieved by using a systemic glyphosate based weedkiller like roundup in late summer when the plant is growing fast. Before application of the weedkiller - run a rake across the patch you want to treat - or trample down the plants, in order to break the protective cuticle on them. Any new growth after the first application should be treated promptly - and further treatments later in the season - or early in the next season may well be required.

Do check before planting fruit bushes or other perennial crops to ensure the ground does not have these weeds as once established it is difficult to remove and will spread. Land infested already with these perennial weeds should be avoided for perennial crops like fruit bushes, aruchokes, asparagus etc. until it is removed.

The roots of both can be left out to dry and burned, drowned in a weed bucket (very smelly but works) and or kept in a plastic bag until they turn to black liquid when they can be added to compost.