

Container plant weeds

We have a small nursery for container grown plants. Among many weed species, crabgrass and spurge are the most common and troublesome. We are thinking of treating the area with Princep before placing the containers in that area. What do you think about using this method to manage the weeds? Will container plant roots pick up the herbicide and injure the nursery plants?

—OHIO

Princep has been the standard soil sterilant used in container grown ornamentals. Reports indicate that Princep can control crabgrass for more than 120 days, and control spurge for 90 days. To prevent direct contact with the treated surface, consider placing the containers on gravel or wooden structures. This should prevent possible contamination of container media and/or root absorption of herbicide.

If you have not used Princep or have not used it in the method discussed, try it on a small scale using different containerized plants. Monitor for possible herbicidal injury. If the applications and arrangements are done properly, there should not be any adverse effects. For any escapes or future problems, consider postemergent, non-selective herbicides (Roundup, Finale or Scythe). Make sure they are labeled for the plant species culture and that your license allows you to use these herbicides. Read and follow label specifications for better control.

Roots and water pipes

We are dealing with several new construction building sites with a number of large willow trees. Because of the close proximity of these trees to buildings, we are afraid that the tree roots may cause damage to water pipes. For this reason, we were considering using Biobarrier. Can Biobarrier be used around water pipes and sewer lines without harming the water?

—INDIANA

A representative from Reemay, Inc.—the maker of Biobarrier—replies:

"Tree roots seek and follow the wall of the pipe because of condensation and oxygen along the wall. When they find a small hole or leaking joint, they grow through, and the problems start. A strip of Biobarrier wrapped around the joint will provide added protection from movement due to changing soil conditions or roots exerting pressure as they grow radially next to the pipe wall. You can also wrap drain lines without obstructing the flow out while still preventing root encroachment.

"Trifluralin, the active ingredient in Biobarrier, releases in vapor form and is adsorbed into the soil. Root tip elongation is blocked, and growth towards the pipe is prevented. Trifluralin is not taken up into the tree or ornamental, and has no adverse effects on other roots outside the zone."

(Reply edited due to space limitations—ed.)

Hydrogel in planters?

What is your opinion on the use of water-adsorbing polymer products, such as hydrogel, in the container production of nursery ornamental plants?

Would it be better to incorporate it into the planting media or dribble it beneath the liner or pots?

—OHIO

Some reports suggest that hydrogels can reduce watering requirements of container grown plants, reduce transplant shock, increase nutrient retention of media and enhance plant growth. There are conflicting reports about their practical use, and benefits are questionable. Reports from Auburn University, as well as our own experience, suggest that hydrogel products may not be advantageous for container production. Watering frequency was not decreased by use of these products. In some instances they may reduce or not affect the shoot and root growth.

Comparatively, incorporation is better than the dribbling method. A product beneath the liner may cause the liners to force out of place, requiring repotting. If young plants did well and can produce roots into and out of growing media, forcing the plant out may not be a concern. Water-adsorbing polymers such as hydrogels may aide water use for some species of plants and not for others.

This practice may also be advantageous in drought or during water bans.



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