

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO CREDIT: Dr. William M. Johnson

No matter what type of landscape or garden you tend, weeds are likely one of your more frustrating challenges (pictured above is chamberbitter). A seminar entitled “A Homeowner’s Guide to Weed Control” will be presented by Master Gardener John Jons on Tuesday, August 15, at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office.

Weeds in the landscape. Weeds in the vegetable garden. Just about every gardener has their own weed or army of weeds to disparage or groan about.

My weedy adversary is known by several common names including chamberbitter, gripewood, leafflower and mimosa weed. The scientific name for this weed is a tongue-twisting

moniker: *Phyllanthus urinaria*. Regardless which name you elect to use, this weed can be a major nuisance in your flower beds, vegetable beds, ornamental beds and even lawns.

Chamberbitter is a broad-leaf annual weed that starts growing in spring when soil temperatures start to warm. It’s one

tough weed and can grow to two feet or more in height.

It’s a very adaptable weed and will readily tolerate regular low mowing in lawns. I’ve observed chamberbitter plants set seeds in lawns mowed at a one and one-half inch mowing height.

As tough and as invasive



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chamberbitter is capable of, I am happy and relieved to report that I am winning the battle with this pesky weed for ownership of the land area I call home.

I even know how it gained a foothold on the property. It just hopped a free ride on some potted plants that I bought some time ago from a nursery. A lesson learned the hard way. Always check any plants or plants purchased from any nursery (and even pass-a-long plants given by gardening friends) for weed infestations.

Speaking of lessons learned, when bringing newly purchased plants home, I now quarantine the plants for at least two weeks to see if weeds start to grow in the potting soil. Nurseries will often remove any weeds present in their growing stock before delivering to a retail site.

Even if the potting soil appears free of weed growth, I keep them well watered and inspect for weed infestation over the two-week quarantine period. If weeds start to germinate, I remove them and then I remove the top inch or so of the potting soil in a pot and dispose of the material into a plastic bag for garbage pickup.

I try to pull a few chamberbitter weeds several evenings each week after returning home from work or whenever I am patrolling my landscape or gardens. After a multi-year battle with this weedy adversary, I'm proud to report that my home landscape is nearly free of chamberbitter. Note that I stated "nearly" —

I am well aware that letting just one plant go to seed would re-ignite the battle all over again.

Of course, I have used other management options in my battle including herbicides as well as mulching.

Chamberbitter produces numerous small green-red fruits that are round and warty-like along the underside of the stems. Seeds are easily dispersed on gardening utensils, on shoes, and by rainwater. The most distinct feature of this weed is the numerous, small, smooth, round fruits attached to the undersides of its stems.

Just one plant can produce thousands of seeds. Chamberbitter has rapidly spread across many southern states by nurseries transporting potted nursery plants. This is another reason for inspecting plants purchased at retail nurseries for any weed infestations.

Chamberbitter is native to several countries in South America. In Peru, the weed has been used to treat gall and kidney stones. While that is impressive, I am not wavering in my efforts to eliminate that adversary from my property. I'll just rely on my medical provider to rectify any gall and kidney stones issues should this ever become a medical issue.

So what's your weed problem or problems? Control is best achieved through an integrated use of mechanical, cultural and chemical methods, depending on

the specific weeds.

No matter what kind of landscape or garden you tend, weeds are likely one of your more frustrating challenges. There are a number of practices you can incorporate into your battle plan to keep weeds under control.

However, by knowing what weed species you are dealing with and understanding how a weed grows and knowing a few prevention tips, you'll be on your way to having a healthier, more weed-free property.

Upcoming Seminar on Weeds

No matter what kind of landscape or garden you tend, weeds are likely one of your more frustrating challenges. However, there are a number of practices you can incorporate into your battle plan to keep weeds under control. Master Gardener John Jons will provide a seminar on "Common, Everyday Weeds—A Homeowner's Guide to Weed Control" and discuss major weed pests in our home landscapes and options for their control. His seminar will be held on Tuesday, August 15, from 6:30 - 8:00 p.m. at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office in Carbide Park, 4102 Main St., in La Marque. The program is free, but preregistration is required by e-mail (galvcountymgs@gmail.com) or by phone (281-309-5065) to ensure availability of handouts.