

Gardening Basics

Pre-emergence Herbicide in an Established Rose Bed

Weed control in ornamental beds is a constant chore. There are several methods for weed management, including mechanical removal, mulching or sheet mulching, and chemical control. Let's walk through the pros and cons of each in managing the weeds in a mature rose bed.

According to John F. Karlik of the University of California Agriculture & Natural Resources, mulches supplemented with regular hand weeding should provide enough weed control in most home rose garden beds.

Mechanical Weed Removal

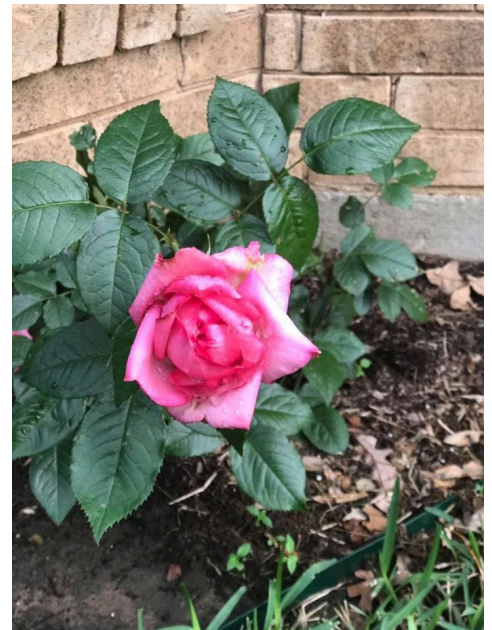
Roses are shallow-rooted plants, so care needs to be taken when mechanically removing weeds. Using hand tools is best rather than hoes to avoid damaging the roses' roots. A favorite is a Hori-Hori garden knife. Remove the weeds when they are young before they go to seed. Attempt to remove the entire weed plant, including the roots.

Mulching or Sheet Mulching

John Karlik recommends mulching with 2 to 4 inches of organic material, such as wood chips, to reduce annual weeds and make hand-weeding easier in the rose bed. Sheet mulching is the most effective method for reducing weeds in ornamental beds.

Sheet mulching, also known as sheet composting or lasagna composting, is an excellent way to control broadleaf and grassy weeds in ornamental beds while improving the soil simultaneously! Here are the steps to take every spring, usually after the last frost, to prepare my ornamental beds for the growing season:

- Start by mechanically removing any weeds or grass in the beds.
- Pull back any existing mulch and cover the soil with overlapping layers of cardboard or several layers of newspaper. The carbon in these materials smothers the broadleaf and grassy weeds.
- Thoroughly wet the cardboard or newspaper covering and add a layer of fully composted material to add nitrogen. Composted manure is a good choice.
- Top that layer with 2 to 4 inches of mulch, such as wood chips.
- These layers will decompose over time, improving the soil's condition by adding microbes and nutrients to the soil that the plants need to be healthy.



Wedding Bell Rose, Kimberly Bien, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, Denton County MGA

Woven landscape fabric can also be placed over the soil and then covered with mulch to control weeds. This material, of course, does not improve the soil as sheet mulching does.

Chemical Control

There are pre-emergence herbicides that can be used around roses before weeds emerge. John Karlik recommends pre-emergence herbicides with the active ingredient oryzalin or pendimethalin, which have been effective in field trials and

did not injure the rose plants. Pre-emergence must be applied when the soil temperatures are below 55 degrees, and the air temperature is consistently below 70 degrees. In North Texas, this is typically mid-to-late March.

To control grassy weeds that have already emerged, John Karlik recommends postemergence herbicides with the active ingredients fluazifop-p-butyl or clethodim, which were also effective in field trials and did not injure the rose plants.

Mr. Karlik also warns against using any broadleaf postemergence herbicides around roses, such as 2,4-D, triclopyr, and dicamba, as roses are sensitive to those chemicals. In addition, non-selective herbicides such as glyphosate should not be used near roses.

Always check the labels of each herbicide before using it for labeled bedding plants, susceptible weeds, and any precautions that should be observed.

Combine All Three Methods for Success

You will likely need to combine all three methods - mechanical removal, mulching, and chemical control - to completely control the weeds in the rose beds. The combination of mulching/sheet mulching and using preemergence herbicides can significantly reduce the amount of hand weeding needed during the growing season.

Sources and Resources

Karlik, John F. "Roses: Cultural Practices and Weed Control." ipm.ucanr.edu, University of California Agriculture & Natural Resources, 1 Jul. 2019, ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7465.html.

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