

WEEDS

PREVENTION

- **Mulch** to block sunlight and don't allow plants to grow. Use mulch in walkways, along fences where mowing is impossible, under bushes and trees.
- **Plant something** you like wherever there is bare soil, which is an open invitation for something to grow. Take the time to design or redesign areas where weeds always show up.
- **Cut weeds before they seed.** Don't let weeds go to seed. Mustard produces 13,000 seeds per plant. Mow, weedeat, cultivate or graze before plants produce seeds.
- **Tolerate the "weeds"** and let them regenerate the soil. Plants that we call weeds are often the only ones that can grow where the soil has been sprayed or trampled for years.
- **Let the grass grow.** Lawns cut too short invite weeds to grow. Watch as you are cutting to make sure that there remains a thick layer of grass.
- **Water only wanted plants.** Sprinklers will help everything to grow; drip emitters can be directed to desirable plants.
- **Use a clear plastic cover** (1 to 2 mils) to increase soil temperatures. This will kill weed seeds and young plants.

LESS-TOXIC CONTROLS

- **Hoing** a weed bed takes about as long as it does to load up a spray tank, spray, and clean up.
- **Singe young weeds** with a specially designed torch, called a flamer. Plants are heated up until they wilt – no flames please. This is a good tool for larger areas, and can be found at farm and hardware stores.
- **Control young weeds**, when the populations are small. A single weed does not look threatening, but consider this: yellow starthistle produces up to 70,000 seeds per plant, a curly dock has 30,000, and common mullein has 223,000.
- **Learn** which "weeds" are really bad, and which ones have a good side. Mustard, parsley, and sunflower family weeds are good nectar sources for beneficial insects. Some weeds protect soil from water run off or from becoming dust bowls. Deep rooted weeds can break up hard pans, some weeds are good at absorbing minerals, and weeds are also free green mulch for your compost.
- **Cover bare soil** to prevent a continual problem. After all weed control efforts, make sure that you haven't cleared out an area that just allows different weeds to move in. Many weed seeds can live in the soil anywhere from 3 to 70 years!
- Many weeds that are cut to the ground will regrow from underground structures. To control these weeds, dig out as much of the root as you can.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, please contact the Central Coast Environmental Health Project (CCEHP) at (805) 963-1622 ext. 111, or the Santa Barbara County Agricultural Commissioner at (805) 681-5600. Information compiled by the Environmental Center of San Luis Obispo (ECOSLO) and the San Luis Obispo County Agricultural Commissioner's office on behalf of the CCEHP.