

#bepesticidefree

problem pests: Creeping Charlie

What exactly is it?

Creeping Charlie (*Glechoma heracea*), also called ground ivy or gill-over-the-ground, is an introduced European species from the mint family. It is often considered an aggressive weed due to its ability to take over lawn areas. It is a perennial plant with wide oval leaves and tiny lavender flowers. The roots of the Creeping Charlie plant are rhizomatous. They have the ability to form dense mats beneath the soil and take over areas of lawn.

What is it telling you?

The presence of any weed provides information about the health and character of your soil. Creeping Charlie indicates that your soil is low in nutrients. Creeping Charlie is generally a problem in heavy, rich soils with good fertility, high moisture, and low boron content. It thrives particularly well in shady areas where grass does not grow well.



How to Identify Creeping Charlie

Leaves:

- wide, oval, scallop-edged leaves (seen at left)
- pick some leaves, squish them and if they smell like mint it is Creeping Charlie

Stems:

- square (4-sided) stems
- extensive systems of creeping/horizontal stems

Flowers:

- small bluish-purple funnel-shaped, on short stalks.

Roots:

- shallow rhizomes

How to deal with it:

Cultural Controls (altering the layout of a garden to detract and repel pests):

Prevention is the best cure. Overseed your lawn in the fall and spring and use an organic fertilizer. By building up the root system of your lawn and pulling out the Creeping Charlie, you can eventually choke out this pest. Be sure to mow high (7.5 cm or 3 in) to reduce the amount of available sun exposure. You can also leave grass clippings on the lawn to strengthen the roots of the grass.

In very shady areas, you may need to change your garden plan. Even grass that is "shade-loving" still needs five hours of sunlight to thrive. Try planting shade-loving plants as borders around trees and other shady spots. Some of those that do well in Saskatoon include various ferns, Solomon's Seal, Ligularia and Bleeding Heart.

For more ideas visit: gardenline.usask.ca/yards/shadeperennials



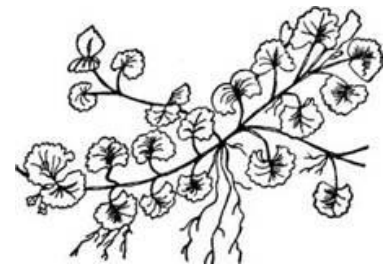
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Mechanical Controls (pulling and digging):

Sometimes you just have to get down and dig. The roots are very extensive so you may feel like you are fighting a losing battle. Here are a few hints that may help:

1. Weed early in the spring. If you get them when they first pop up, the roots will not be as extensive and you can get them before they spread too far.
2. Be consistent. Go out regularly to pull out the roots to prevent them from taking over.
3. Be sure to discard the roots in a bucket and dispose of in the garbage. The plant can take root anywhere and the compost may not be able to completely decompose it (a hot compost is required to kill the weed seeds). If the weed seeds are left in the compost, you will be planting the Creeping Charlie all over again!
4. Use some good digging tools to access the roots. A couple that are commercially available include:



CobraHead Weeding Tool: like using a "steel fingernail" and can be found online at www.cobrahead.com



Culti-Weeder: can be found at gardening centres, such as Dutch Growers Garden Centre in Saskatoon, SK.

Organic Controls (natural sprays or applications to kill weeds):

You can try a simple acetic acid solution (vinegar) and apply directly to the leaves. Be sure to avoid other plants, as it will kill them too. This will only harm the leaves however, and will not get the roots. Higher concentrations of acetic acid are available at garden centres. For a more long-term solution you can try the following:

Borax Solution

- All plants need boron to survive but too much will kill them. Creeping Charlie has a much lower tolerance to boron than grass does, so when treated with a Borax solution, Creeping Charlie will die whereas grass should be unharmed.

CAUTION: This is a very sensitive treatment- while many organic gardeners swear by it; others will not go near it because they are worried about the possible side-effects to their soil. **If borax is applied repeatedly or at too strong of a concentration, you will end up with an area where you cannot grow anything until the boron leaches out. That may take years. Use sparingly and only as a last resort.**

1. Dissolve 300ml (10 ounces) of Borax into 120ml (4 oz) or warm water.
2. Dilute it in 9.5L (2 ½ gallons) or water.
3. Spray evenly over 1,000 square feet of lawn. No more, no less.



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To learn more about the information in this factsheet:

Book: The Organic Gardener's Handbook of Natural Insect and Disease Control Ed. By Barbara W. Ellis and Fern Marshall Bradley

Images taken from: http://www.desert-tropicals.com/Plants/Lamiaceae/Glechoma_hederacea.html, www.cobrahead.com, http://hcs.osu.edu/albums/bygl/creeping_charlie2.jpg

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