

Creeping Charlie,

Everyone's Least Favorite Weed But Not Always ...by the Editor

by Lyn Chimera

Glechoma hederacea, better known as creeping Charlie, is one of the most common and unfortunately hard to control lawn and garden weeds that we regularly encounter. It is a creeping ground cover with elongated stems between pairs of opposite growing leaves. The 25-cent to 50-cent sized leaves are round, heart shaped sometimes described as "cat's paws" with scalloped edges. It has lavender to purple/ blue funnel shaped small flowers usually in May. It's a perennial weed which means it grows back every year.

Glechoma has culinary and medicinal uses which is why Europeans brought it here. The fresh herb can be steeped in hot water to make a tisane rich in vitamin C. It has a peppery flavor, can be cooked as a pot herb but is usually eaten in a salad. It was used in brewing beer before hops was even considered! The editor has eaten it ... yummy.

One reason creeping Charlie is so difficult to control is that it propagates by seed and establishes roots at each part of the stem where there are leaves (leaf node). Anyone who has tried to remove this tenacious plant by pulling it has discovered this feature!

The first line of defense in any weed control is proper identification. Once you have identified the weed, then you need to examine why it is growing there and what to do about it. Creeping Charlie prefers moist, shady areas. Unfortunately these are conditions

grass does not prefer so creeping Charlie has a growth advantage in those areas.

A healthy lawn will help prevent creeping Charlie from getting established. Over-seeding bare spots in lawn with an appropriate grass seed will help crowd out the weed. Another strategy is to mow at height of 3 inches. This allows

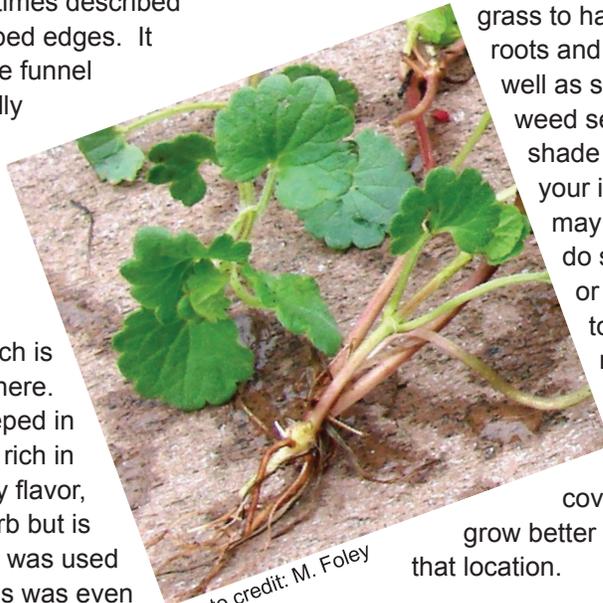


Photo credit: M. Foley

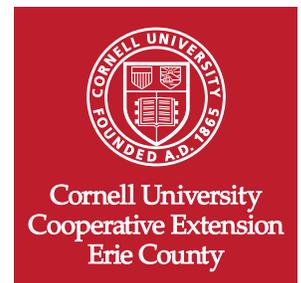
grass to have healthier roots and blades as well as shade out weed seedlings. If shade is one of your issues, you may be able to do some branch or tree thinning to create more sun or consider an alternative ground cover that will grow better than grass in that location.

Hand weeding can be difficult and frustrating due to the fact that there are roots at many of the leaf nodes. If the soil is moist and you are careful to dig the roots, you will be more successful. Weeding them from garden beds is a lot easier. Removing them as soon as they show up is the key to success. A hoe, rake or dethatching tool can be helpful.

If an herbicide is required, studies have shown that spring and fall are the best times to apply. During the heat of the summer, plants are not growing as fast and not as susceptible to the effect of herbicides.

Dr. Frank Rossi, turf expert from Cornell, recommends a post emergent herbicide at those times. Anytime an herbicide is used directions on the label need to be followed carefully. Borax is often listed as an appropriate herbicide for creeping Charlie, but Dr. Rossi has found it isn't that effective and is harmful to other nearby foliage.

Another alternative is to just mow it. This is the tactic I use. From the street it is green and blends in with the grass so you can't even tell. Another advantage is it doesn't brown up in the hot dry weeks of summer — an easy solution, if you can live with it.



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