

Article—NUTGRASS: The Down & Dirty on the Worst Weed of the South!!

By Mark Carpenter

My article for this issue is, to be frank, an unpleasant one! That bright, shiny foliage weed known as nutgrass is our topic today. I decided to write about this relentless weed after spending the last week battling it. But in truth, I've spent the last 5 years battling it, and for the most part, it's been a losing battle. But through those losses there has been substantial learning, and I hope to share some of that with you today.

WIKIHOW defines nutgrass as follows: "Nut grass, also called nutsedge, is a horrifically resilient weed that plagues many a lawn. It has strong roots and nodules that are often referred to as "nuts" (hence the name). The most thorough way to rid your lawn of nut grass is by removing the plant, root and all, by hand. You can also try chemical herbicides, however, or you can coat the grass in sugar as an organic alternative". Please note the descriptors..."horrifically resilient"! LOL! ACCURATE to the 10th degree!!

Here is my history at the Lily Farm with this plague. I have tried pulling it out by hand, spraying it chemically, burning it, tilling it over and over, among other actions. Here is what I have found in terms of what really works.

Tilling it under over and over. Brilliant idea here. The more you till it, the more it reproduces. You see, every time you cut the wire leading to the nut (located 8 to 18" under the soil) the nutgrass goes into defense mode and will immediately produce MULTIPLE new nutgrass segments. So if you cut one wire, you get 3 new ones in return. Cut 300, you get 900. Not a pretty picture. Analysis of this technique: NEVER EVER DO IT!

Spraying it with chemicals. I can't tell you how many people claim to have the product that takes care of nutgrass, and I've tried just about all of them. The result is usually the same: You WILL KILL the above ground nutgrass that you can see, but you will NOT kill the nut that reproduces more nutgrass in the future. Chemicals used include: Image (this will kill your daylilies if it comes in contact); Manage (same as Image); Sedgehammer (many claim this one works and you can spray over the top of daylilies). This one kills the existing nutgrass you can see, but the nuts will reproduce the next season. And you CANNOT spray over the top of daylilies, especially newly transplanted ones or seedlings, as it can kill both; Roundup; will kill the existing but the nuts will usually produce more nutsedge the following year. Roundup can stunt and sometimes kill existing daylilies...so you can't spray it over the top either. Analysis of this technique: It works short term, but won't work long term.

Remove by hand: If you simply pull it up, every single time you do this you will break off the "wire" connecting the nut to the nutgrass, which in turn will produce multiple new segments of nutgrass. Basically this technique is the same as tilling it! Not a good idea. Analysis: You are getting warm (>)).

Remove by digging under it with a shovel and pulling the nut out. This will get you under it, but the shovel itself will often hit the connecting wire of the nutgrass, cutting it and forcing it to produce multiple new shoots. Analysis: You are getting warmer!

Remove by digging under it using a pitchfork. BINGO! This is the ONLY technique that we have found to work for MULTIPLE years. The pitchfork has a much greater chance of missing the connecting wire, and allows you to get under the nut and wires so you can pull the entire thing out of the ground. You will still occasionally cut some nuts, but not nearly as often as a shovel. Analysis: This takes the longest amount of time, involved physical work, but is the ONLY way we have found that works at about 90% of the time!

Below are pictures taken today at the farm as we work on eradicating this horrendous weed from our daylily beds. I hope this information will help you overcome the devil's weed!



This shows the nuts and the wires that come out of each nut, all resulting in multiple new nutsedge. This one strand contained 5 separate nutsedge. Notice the multiple roots coming out of the nut in the middle of the pic.

Each root will form its own nut, and then multiply into many more nutsedge.

Nutsedge above ground. You can see the white colored “wire” attachment to it. It is a filament that if peeled off, will show a true tiny but strong “wire” that will connect to other nutsedge underground.



Here is an entire “clump” of nutsedge dug up with a pitchfork from ONE LOCATION! There are over 30 pieces of nutsedge, and you can see multiple dark black nuts, each of which will send out wires and multiple new pieces of nutsedge. Any time the nut thinks its under attack, it will send out new roots to form new nutsedge. Incredible how resilient this beast is!



The pitchfork allows you to get UNDER the nutsedge wire and lift it up, so you can pull out the connected nutsedge WITH THE NUT AND THE WIRE without cutting it. I have found this is BY FAR the best way to get rid of nutsedge. But beware, as any nut that you cut off or that falls off while you are sifting through it will again form new nutsedge!

"After posting this article on Facebook, I received some important information regarding a chemical that actually HAS worked for folks in killing BOTH the above ground nut and the below ground nut, and that product is called MSMA. However, I do not recommend spraying MSMA over the top of your daylilies without risk of killing the plants or stunting their growth for a season. I was also told that sprays need to be applied in spring/early summer for the best chance of control. But with that said, I did have multiple people tell me that MSMA DID kill off the nutgrass. So there is another option out there!