

Winter annual weeds, a great place to hide Easter eggs

As a boy in a small town in Georgia we had a St. Augustinegrass lawn. My dad started the lawn before I was born. That lawn was still doing fine when I left for college at age seventeen. I don't remember weeds in the lawn during summer months. I do fondly remember winter "weeds" in that lawn.

To see clumps of winter annuals in our yard and neighbor's yards was a natural part of the transition from winter to spring. They added interest to what would have been a plain palette of green. It was expected to see henbit with its square stiff stems holding up a display of small pinkish purple flowers in late winter and early spring. A clump of henbit was a great place to hide an Easter egg, especially a pink or purple one.

Wild geranium, another common winter annual, offered another good hiding place for Easter eggs with its pink to purple flowers. Large clumps of annual chickweed would nicely hide whole eggs. Green colored eggs would blend with chickweed's green leaves.

Crimson clover with its reddish flowers, hop clover and black medic with their bright yellow flowers were good hiding places for Easter eggs. Plus clovers add nitrogen back to our soils.

I never remember my dad using any weed killer, he rarely watered. The lawn was healthy and thick enough to be a deterrent to summer weeds. But during fall and winter as the lawn would naturally thin and go dormant, winter annual weeds would run their course.

I've heard that the sense of smell provides our strongest memories. I remember the first mowing of the season with the clean smell of chlorophyll in the spring air. It was refreshing. Once mowed and as the heat took its toll, by late April or mid May, these winter annual weeds were gone. What was left was a green lawn to help cool the landscape as the weather warmed. The lawn was mowed high as St. Augustine should be, played on and typically not worried with.

Most people have winter weeds in their lawns that let us know spring is near. Perhaps we worry too much with these seasonal, temporary plants that may have wrongly been labeled as weeds. Besides, how long have we been doing battle with these weeds and they are still here. Most lawns have countless numbers of winter annual seeds awaiting the cooler temperatures and shorter days of early winter to begin yet another generation. By May they are gone.

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