

GARDENING TIPS

Nettles: If there are any butterfly eggs or larvae present then please leave them. Otherwise the best way to control nettles, forget herbicides, is to wait until July, when the plant has made its optimum amount of growth, give them a good tug wearing a glove and that way you'll prevent all that strength from going back into the root system and eventually, after a few years, the plant will be weakened.

It's a fallacy by the way to say that every good wildlife garden should have its own patch of nettles. It is the larval food-plant of various Nymphalidae and if nettles were in any way rare, I'd say fair enough, but it is a very aggressive plant, sending out roots and producing seeds all over the place. Down just about every lane throughout Europe there are nettles everywhere and an odd patch in your garden really is not going to help much at all. There needs to be far greater respect shown for those growing out in the wider countryside; there are those who spray them for no real gain at every opportunity.

Unwanted bushes: If you've got a bramble or an elder growing out of the base of your brickwork, you may want to know how to best deal with them. Most people's idea is to bring out the chemicals or to resort to back breaking digging. A far better way is to simply cut it off at around two inches high and to cap it with an empty dog or cat food can, or an iron bucket if it's really big. The object is to exclude the light, so push the tin well into the soil or if you're working on concrete sprinkle soil around base of the tin.

Go back to it in a month, break off any white shoots that would have appeared by then and replace the can. Return to it one month later and repeat the same, and again a month after that. As and when there's no regrowth cover it over for one last month and the job's done. Works best on species that don't send out too many underground runners.

Goose Grass: This is an annual plant and so it's all about seed prevention. Wait until there are tiny unripened seeds, at that time the plant's put out its full growth but the seeds wouldn't have ripened yet. Rake it up in clumps and this will prevent the production of seeds.

Bindweed: Again, as with other plants, just by preventing the strength from getting back into the root-system will weaken it. Just wait for the plant to reach its maximum growth, which in the case of Bindweed is August, and then snap it off at the base. Very often when doing this the roots will pull up as well.

Japanese Knotweed: August is the month this plant reaches its optimum amount of growth and whether or not this method would work here I don't have Knotweed so I've never put it to the test. It would certainly be more effect than the council's typical policy of spraying the stuff in mid-June. It is after all just a plant, a pretty formidable one admittedly, but a plant nonetheless. All plants have to make their growth and build up their strength and if you treat it in the same way by just cutting it off at ground level in August each year then this should weaken it.