

## *Controlling Weeds in Dichondra*

WAYNE C. MORGAN

*L. A. County Farm Advisor*

The ground cover *Dichondra repens* has found widespread acceptance in southern California as a substitute for a grass lawn. This popular low-growing herb can form a dense sod in the warmer areas of the state if given reasonable maintenance.

One of its chief advantages is its ability to remain green the year round if winters are not severe. Because it has poor wear resistance and low disease, salinity, drought and compacted-soil tolerance, weed invasion can often be a problem.

The first step in weed control is to build a strong, dense turf by good management practices. *Dichondra* will respond favorably to monthly fertilization, using 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. Be sure to water immediately following application to avoid burning of the leaves.

Regular weekly mowing at  $\frac{1}{2}$ " to  $\frac{3}{4}$ " (slightly higher during summer in interior valleys) will help to produce leaves close to the ground and form a tight, dense mat that is resistant to weed invasion.

Mature *dichondra* will root to a depth of 12 inches or more in a fertile soil if good irrigation practices are followed. Only apply water to the upper few inches of root zone as often as the plants first begin to show a need for it. Climate and soil will dictate how often this will be. Once every two to three weeks in summer, allow the sprinklers to run slowly and long enough to have the soil wet to a depth of one foot or more. Frequent shallow irrigation will weaken the *dichondra* and encourage attacks by disease and weed invasion.

Under good maintenance practices, a few weeds may sometimes start growing in *dichondra*. Many of these will be tall and spindly and will pull easily when young. Oxalis and bermuda can be easily controlled by hand weeding in the early stages of invasion. This must be done persistently to avoid these weeds becoming established. The adjoining *dichondra* will quickly spread to heal over the disturbed areas.

Many chemicals are now available for controlling weeds in *dichondra*. It is very important to follow the directions on the label because the manufacturers have gone to considerable effort and expense to determine the best and safest use of their products. Often the margin between effectiveness and injury is only slight. Repeated applications may be necessary.

Some broadleaf weeds may be controlled by spot application of 2,4-D, wetting the leaves with a sponge or paint brush, or by placing a few drops in the heart of the weed with an oil can. Whenever the material touches the *dichondra* leaves, the plant will be killed. Most shrubs and trees are also injured by 2,4-D, so care must be exercised to see that it is applied when there is no wind and the spray will not drift to other desirable plants. Control of dandelions, plantains and bristly ox-tongue will be achieved with one application of the 2,4-D.



Oxalis and bur clover in dichondra can be killed by spraying with monuron. There are several commercial formulations of this material, so follow directions as to rate and frequency. Time of application is also important.

Annual bluegrass, crabgrass, bermuda, or other grasses can be eliminated from dichondra by using one of two chemicals. The first of these is Dowpon. For the annual grasses, use 2 ounces applied in water to 1,000 square feet of area. Bermuda and other perennial grasses are best controlled with spot applications using  $\frac{2}{3}$  ounce in a gallon of water to wet the foliage. Repeat the application about one week after any new green growth may appear.

The second material for controlling grasses and other narrow-leaved weeds in dichondra is diphenamid, sold under several trade names. For the annual grasses, use 10 pounds of actual material per acre (7 ounces of a 50% material per 1,000 square feet). If bermudagrass is present use double the rate and repeat the application about one week after any new green growth may appear.

Both of these materials are slow-acting, so it may be a couple of weeks before results will appear. For controlling annual grasses, it is preferable to treat in the fall of the year before the annual grasses germinate or become well established. For greatest effectiveness against bermudagrass, the weather must be warm and the bermuda growing well, as in the spring.

When crabgrass is the only weedy grass, Betasan, or dichondra preparation of lead arsenate, or Zytron may be used in January or February before the crabgrass germinates.

When most crabgrass seed has already germinated apply disodium methyl arsonate (liquid and dry preparations are available under several trade names). One to 3 applications 5 to 7 days apart will kill crabgrass without injury to dichondra. For best results apply before crabgrass goes to seed, usually in August.

Spot killing of all weeds (as well as the dichondra) may be accomplished with the use of a new chemical, dimethyl arsenic acid, sold as Kilz-All or Weed-Out. For the bermuda and other deep-rooted perennial grasses, repeat applications about three to four weeks apart will be required. This chemical is safe to use beneath shrubs and trees and replanting may be done after 5 days.

The manufacturer of a product combining the herbicides diphenamid and trifluralin reports that this material will control prostrate spurge in dichondra but this has not been tested by the author.

## *How to Grow Dichondra*

ROBERT E. ATKINSON

Choose dichondra for planting only lawns that receive little wear from foot traffic. This is especially true in heavy soil that compacts easily if walked on when wet. Do not attempt to grow dichondra when drainage is very poor, if irrigation water is excessively saline or if soil is extremely alkaline. It is not the most economical lawn by far, nor is it in any way a "lazy man's" lawn.

Dichondra easily survives 25 degrees but may be damaged if walked on when the leaves are frozen. It is a marginal choice in areas that regularly have temperatures below 20 degrees but can survive 12 degrees with only some leaf browning. All the leaves will be killed at temperatures of 8 to 12 degrees and the whole planting will be killed if the soil freezes from 2 to 4 inches deep.





Morgan, Wayne C. 1964. "Controlling weeds in Dichondra." *Lasca leaves* 14(Summer 1964), 64–65.

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