

Branch Creek Farm, Perkasie PA**Weed Management**

Mark and Judy Dornstreich have been farming for over 30 years in beautiful Bucks County, PA. They produce baby greens, specialty vegetables and edible flowers year-round in 3 greenhouses. Come summer, they shift their attention out to the field where they grow unique vegetable varieties on about 5 acres. They provide Philadelphia and New York City restaurants with only the highest quality, mouth-watering produce.

**Greenhouses**

Mark makes his own compost for out in the fields but the prevalence of weed seeds within that compost is potentially high. So he buys in McEnroe Organic Compost for greenhouse beds in need of additional nutrients. Buying in a clean compost mix means the weeds stay out of the greenhouses.

Buying seed from reliable sources also cuts back on weeds. It's important to read the seed pack before seeding beds in your greenhouses with them. Sometimes they contain “% noxious weed seed”. You want to avoid using seed like that in a closed environment.

The term “weed” means any undesired plant. A common problem in the greenhouse is that beds are not always cleaned as thoroughly as they should be. Not all the seeds planted in a bed germinate at the same time. Sometimes when you are harvesting a crop, seeds that haven't germinated yet are still in the bed. If those seeds fall deep into the bed when you're cleaning it, most likely they will germinate with the new crop you intend to plant. For example, you could have a nice stand of arugula coming up with patches of radish all throughout it. This makes the arugula hard to harvest and takes more time than it should.

**In the Field**

“Organic growers are too hung up on weeds” says Mark. “I don't mean you should let them take over but I don't think you need to spend all your time cultivating. From what I can see of the weeds growing out of the pavement, they don't require a whole lot of nutrients to survive. I just make sure to put down enough compost for everyone, that way there's no competition.” The way he sees it, weeds are just plants. When you make a perfect bed for seeding with plenty of nutrition, you're just making a better environment for the weeds, also.

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The biggest threat weeds pose is shading out the crop. To prevent that from happening, Mark advises “cultivat[ing] them before you even see them...and don’t EVER let them come up before the crop. If that happens, you might as well just get out the disk”.

Just about all the field crops get planted on black plastic mulch. The mulch gets layed a few days before planting, which possibly raises the temperature under the plastic high enough to kill weed seeds. Also, it prevents weeds from coming up around the plants. The “trouble spot” is right along the edge of the black plastic mulch. That is where the majority of the weeds will show up. After planting, Mark will mulch right up along the sides of the plastic. This suppresses the weeds along the edges, resulting in weed free beds!

Farm Profiles are designed to give new producers ideas and advice from experienced producers. Individual products are mentioned as examples not as an endorsement. Prepared by Aston Ward, Penn State Extension. Photos taken by Aston Ward, courtesy of Branch Creek Farm. Last updated May 2011.