Invasive Plant Alert: New Highly Invasive Plant in LAH

Invasive oxalis plant

Oxalis has completely taken over this planting area

The highly invasive, oxalis or Bermuda buttercup (*Oxalis pes-caprae*), has recently appeared in Los Altos Hills. This explosively invasive weed has potential to invade widely throughout the Town, crowding out native and ornamental plants and requiring significant, long-term costs for control.

Oxalis reproduces rapidly, spreads aggressively, and can out-compete and completely displace other plants, resulting in a monoculture of solid oxalis. Because it forms prolific underground bulbs, oxalis is exceedingly difficult to eradicate. This invasive has potential to move into and radically alter the plant composition and ecology of the Town's natural areas.

Oxalis is prime food for gophers, which can be attracted by it, take up residence, and multiply along with the oxalis. In Portola Valley a small landslide occurred on an oxalis-covered slope that had been extensively undermined with gopher tunnels.

Early action is essential to prevent oxalis from spreading widely and leaving a long-term legacy of unnecessary work and expense for residents to try to control it.

Where does oxalis grow?

Invasive oxalis thrives on most soil types, in both full sun and shade, and easily invades everywhere: lawns, meadows, flower beds, vegetable gardens, ground cover, orchards, vineyards, pathways, and roadsides.

How can I recognize oxalis?

Oxalis is low growing with three clover-like leaves and bright yellow flowers attached to the tip of a long stem. Leaves are green with purplish spots and both flowers and leaves close at night.

Oxalis dies back in summer, but unless treated will reappear over wider areas and in much greater numbers as soon as the fall rains start.

How is oxalis brought to LAH?

Oxalis spreads by bits of root and underground bulbs carried to new locations by contaminated soil, mulch, nursery plants, mowers, gardening equipment, and construction vehicles and equipment.

What can be done to prevent oxalis from infesting my property?

The best control is prevention. Watch for oxalis on your property and in your neighborhood and remove it immediately.

How can I control oxalis?

Repeated, aggressive measures are required. Treatments are most effective if applied early in the season when the plants first come up.

Control methods include:

- Hand-pulling. Pulling young oxalis plants when the soil is soft and before flowers, runners, and bulbs form can be effective, but will require repeated pulling over several seasons. Grasp the roots just below the stem and pull out as much of the roots and underground bulbs as possible. Follow up a few weeks later to pull plants that return…and again a few weeks later, and so on.

  "*It took me five years to control it in my garden and I still find a little leaf. It's just an amazing plant.*" Jack Sigg, Invasive Plant Chairman, California Native Plant Society

- Sheet-mulching. Cover oxalis plants with a layer of cardboard, newspaper, or black fabric available at nurseries and then a layer of clean mulch. This method requires leaving plants covered for up to a year to kill the bulbs.
- Solarizing. Cover oxalis plants with a sheet of transparent plastic and let heat from the sun kill kill the plants.
- Herbicide. Herbicide (e.g., Roundup) can be effective at certain times of year and certain stages of growth. Be aware that herbicides can also kill other plants. Always read product instructions and follow them carefully.
- DO NOT DISK or ROTOTILL! This is sure fire way to quadruple its numbers.

Need help identifying oxalis?

Contact the LAH Open Space Committee for assistance.

Email: lahweeds@earthlink.net Phone: 650-815-8286

Further information about invasive oxalis and how to control it:

http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/O/W-OX-OPES-FL.001.html

http://wric.ucdavis.edu/information/crop/natural areas/wr_O/Oxalis.pdf

http://ccmg.ucanr.edu/files/83817.pdf