

## Weeds: an introduction

A weed is usually defined as "a plant growing where it is not wanted". It's usually only because it gets in the way of human activity (that's us) that it is considered a weed. So plants from a previous crop such as potatoes can be thought of as weeds if they grow in this year's tomato crop. Usually however, common weeds in cropping do not have any commercial value. Couch, witchgrass, nettles and fathen are the type of plants most people think of as weeds.

### Weed Classification

Most weeds are classified as being either annual or perennial. Within that, both annual and perennial weeds may be either grasses or broadleaves (see Trevor James' diagram below).

Annual plants go through a complete life cycle in one year. They grow, flower, set seed and die. Some examples are fathen and willow weed.

Perennial plants take more than one year to complete their lifecycle. But they may continue to seed season after season. Examples include blackberry, couch and gorse.

Biennials are perennials with a two year lifecycle. The first year they grow and get bigger then they die down, usually over winter. The following season they grow again, flower, set seed and die.

### Naming Weeds

The naming system for all living things follows the same general pattern. As with plants found in nurseries or your local supermarket, weeds often have two different names. These names are called the **common name** and the **botanical name**.

Common names differ from place to place. Foreigners don't know what you are talking about. However the name often tells you something

about the plant itself; for example blackberry, Bathurst bur and Californian thistle. Common names are also written in your own language - Maori, English, French, and Russian etc.

On the other hand, botanical names are unique and identifiable anywhere in the world. They also tell you about the plant's relatives. The botanical name has two parts that identify the genus and species. See "The naming system for plants".

Related plants usually have flower parts that look similar. But even plants whose flowers look the same may not actually be related.

Leaves on their own are not a good indicator of plant genus or species. But leaf shape is a good way to identify weeds. See "Correct identification of weeds".

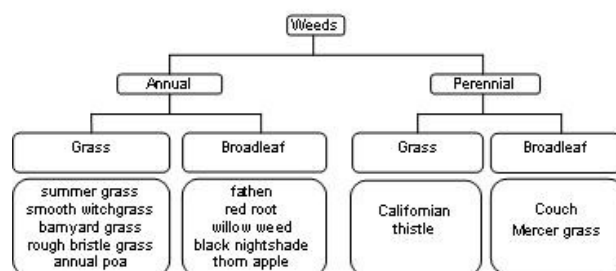


Diagram from Trevor James, AgResearch

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