



Beware of the Parasitic Weed "Dodder"

Dodder is that orange vine you may have seen that looks like Silly String — though not so funny. In fact, it could turn out to be a gardeners worst nightmare.

Dodder (*cuscuta* spp.) is a parasitic annual that attaches itself to a plant —like a vampire— and extracts its nutrients. Quickly drained, the host plant is greatly weakened while the dodder continues its search for fresh prey. With no roots or leaves of its own, dodder can grow up to three inches per day, continuously sprouting small suckers called haustoria which locate and penetrate new host plants.

Dodder is found throughout the country and recognized by the US Department of Agriculture as one of America's 10 most problematic weeds, Celia Thaxter herself recorded dodder's intrusion into her own garden: "Year after year I waged war against it, but even yet it is not entirely exterminated." So while it's not exactly a newcomer, dodder is nonetheless a noxious weed we must work to eradicate.

Once an infestation has begun, its rapid growth, attachment to surrounding host plants, and its quick transition from flowering to seed production necessitate early detection and intervention.

A few facts about dodder and some suggestions for removing it from your land:

- Dodder is easy to recognize: a bright orange, string-like vine you'll find enmeshed within other plants. An infestation will form an easily recognized orange tangle of vines.
- With hard-shelled seeds that remain viable for more than 20 years, it's essential to prevent dodder from going to seed.
- In this area, dodder tends to germinate around the end of June, so the early use of herbicide (before mid-July) will kill the dodder but unfortunately destroy its host as well.
- The safest way to remove dodder is to cut its host well below the dodder's attachment point, bag it, heat the bag in the sun, and transport it to the landfill (do not compost). And diligent scouting of the infected area is important as re-sprouting from plant material left behind or seeds is very likely.
- It is very important to not spread the dodder around when trying to remove it. So weed wacking is not a good idea and mowing should be done very carefully.

Here's a dodder elimination protocol currently practiced by KLT

Upon locating a new dodder infestation:

1. carefully determine the outer boundary of the dodder infestation.
2. cut a wide "dodder-free" buffer zone around the entire area
3. for small areas carefully cut everything inside the buffer area to the ground trying not to spread the dodder outside the buffer area since it may start growing again. Ideally, it is best to bag the debris and remove it since the remains can live for sometime and may still go to seed.
4. for larger areas a herbicide can be used to kill off the entire area. However, if the dodder already has little white flowers then it is likely that some of the dodder will live long enough to form seed. In this case see next step.
5. if the dodder has little golden or brown seed pods then the best course of action is to very carefully cut and bag as many of those seed stalks as possible. Once complete, the rest of the dodder should be cut down to prevent any more seed creation. It is highly likely that dodder will germinate in this area in subsequent years. See protocol for managing previous dodder sites.
6. After removing dodder it is always wise to monitor the site well into August to make sure no new growth is occurring.

For more information about dodder:

http://weedalert.com/weed_pages/wa_dodder.htm#ipmrecs

<http://faculty.ucc.edu/biology-ombrello/POW/dodder.htm>