

Here's why we should stop weeding. Learn to love our dandelions and brambles

## Level 2: Intermediate

### 1 Warmer

- a. Find the words in the wordpool in the wordsearch puzzle below. Then look them up in a dictionary and match them to their meanings.

bindweed

bramble

dandelion

dock

thistle

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| v | d | c | i | c | d | k | c | h | o |
| x | f | a | z | w | o | c | a | b | x |
| t | b | o | n | j | c | z | z | n | n |
| h | c | i | u | d | k | p | z | x | z |
| i | p | e | n | n | e | d | t | z | n |
| s | c | x | f | d | l | l | r | e | d |
| t | a | k | o | m | w | h | i | f | l |
| l | l | g | z | y | s | e | n | o | q |
| e | y | t | d | t | v | f | e | b | n |
| b | r | a | m | b | l | e | u | d | g |

- \_\_\_\_\_ : a wild plant with a thick round purple or white flower and leaves with sharp points. It is often used as a symbol of Scotland.
- \_\_\_\_\_ : a wild plant with large leaves
- \_\_\_\_\_ : a wild plant with a large yellow flower that changes into a furry white ball of seeds called a "clock"
- \_\_\_\_\_ : a wild plant that grows among other plants and winds itself around them
- \_\_\_\_\_ : a bush with thin sharp points on its long branches, especially one that produces blackberries

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### 2 Key words

a. Complete each definition with one of the key words from the article.

aesthetics  
perennial

declare  
pollen

deposit  
resilient

mine  
subversive

mow  
tend

nectar  
vital

1. a verb meaning *announce officially that something is true or happening* \_\_\_\_\_
2. an adjective meaning *able to quickly become healthy, happy, or strong again after an illness, or other problem* \_\_\_\_\_
3. an adjective meaning *intended to destroy the power or influence of a government or an established belief* \_\_\_\_\_
4. a noun meaning *a powder produced by flowers, carried by the wind or insects to other flowers so that they can produce new seeds* \_\_\_\_\_
5. a noun meaning *a sweet liquid that some flowers make and that insects and birds drink* \_\_\_\_\_
6. an adjective describing *a plant that lasts for more than two growing seasons* \_\_\_\_\_
7. a verb meaning *take valuable things out of the ground* \_\_\_\_\_
8. a verb meaning *put or leave something somewhere* \_\_\_\_\_
9. a noun meaning *the beautiful qualities of something* \_\_\_\_\_
10. an adjective meaning *very important, necessary, or essential* \_\_\_\_\_
11. a verb meaning *take care of someone or something* \_\_\_\_\_
12. a verb meaning *cut grass using a machine or tool with blades* \_\_\_\_\_

b. Discuss the questions.

1. What is the most resilient house plant you know?
2. What animals or insects feed on nectar and pollen where you live?
3. Who mows the lawn and tends the garden where you live/study/work?
4. What plants can you think of that have been bred only for their aesthetics?
5. What plants and animals would you declare most vital for the ecosystem?

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Alys Fowler

26 April, 2023

- 1 The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) has declared that this year's Chelsea Flower Show is all about weeds but not as we know them. Four of its 12 show gardens will include plants regarded before as weeds but now described as "resilient" and "heroes". According to this year's organisers, weeds are no longer flowers in the wrong place but exactly where they should be.
- 2 Wild things have been creeping into Chelsea for many years now. Just ask Mary Reynolds, an Irish environmentalist whose gold-winning show garden in 2002 was noted for its "subversive use of weeds", plants that she is still using today in her design work.
- 3 There is more evidence now that weeds are doing far more than taking up resources – they are giving back. Many of our weeds are parts of the food web. They flower at the right time of year to be important sources of pollen and nectar for pollinators. Their leaves, roots and seeds fix insects up with food. Weeds, as the RHS notes, are resilient; they often flower repeatedly, whatever the weather, and will grow in poor soils. They are a buffet that is always open and readily available to insects and worms, unlike more highly bred plants that have lost their nectar and pollen sources to stronger scents or different colours. Too often, this breeding for our eyes or our tastebuds is harmful to the wider food web.
- 4 Weeds feed the soil too. Many perennial weeds have deep root systems that break up soils and mine the subsoil layers for minerals and nutrients, depositing them on the soil surface as their leaves die. Annual weeds are often the first protection for bare soil, their quick lifecycles protecting the top layers of soil so necessary for life. Though much-criticized, weeds protect, build and feed our soil system as they grow.
- 5 Ecologists, wild gardeners and regenerative growers have been keen on weeds for some time, but designers are less so. There is the business of aesthetics, so their suddenly using weeds as a design tool is a change indeed.
- 6 Everyone can learn to love some daisies in their lawn, but docks, brambles, bindweed and dandelions – can you learn to love them?
- 7 Yes, I think you can. They all have uses. The bramble's thorns act as a protective home to the songbirds trying to hide from the cat; then there are flowers, buzzing with bees and other pollinators in midsummer, and the berries we greedily pick. Some are less easy to love, like bindweed, but it is a source of pollen for insects and a food source for moths.
- 8 Our natural habitats are in danger, and our gardens are part of the solution. They are both a habitat and a vital link to the wider, wilder ones. It is best if our gardens are dynamic, with many different ecological spaces for things to grow and live in.
- 9 That weeds can be appreciated for this, and their looks, too, is hopeful. Spend time looking at them, and you will notice that each has a beauty to it. They just need tending, like all the other plants in your garden, mowing the dandelions before they set seed, cutting brambles as you would another berry.
- 10 I never thought I'd write this: let the designers then show you how to ease up on weeding and leave space for these valuable plants, for their time has indeed come.

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### 3 Comprehension check

a. Are these statements True (T) or False (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Dandelions have won the 2023 Chelsea Flower Show.
2. Mary Reynolds included weeds in her 2002 garden and won a gold medal.
3. Weeds are essential for the food web because they provide food, nectar, and pollen to the soil, insects, and other animals.
4. Flowers that have been bred to look a certain way often get other stronger characteristics that make them more beneficial to the food web.
5. Annual weeds are especially good for the top layers of soil.
6. Weeds have been appreciated for their aesthetics for decades.
7. The author thinks gardens should include weeds for living things to thrive.
8. The author says that weeds should grow wild and not be tended like other plants in a garden.

### 4 Key language

a. Match the vocabulary from the text with the definitions.

- |                          |                                                                                      |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. creep into            | a. break something to make smaller pieces                                            |
| 2. take up               | b. do something less                                                                 |
| 3. fix (someone) up with | c. gradually start to affect or change something                                     |
| 4. break up              | d. interested in something and enjoying it, especially an activity that you do often |
| 5. be keen on            | e. arrange for someone to have something that they need                              |
| 6. ease up on            | f. fill a particular amount of space or time                                         |

b. Complete the sentences with vocabulary from the previous activity. Then ask and answer the questions.

1. What other new ideas are \_\_\_\_\_ gardening and agriculture?
2. What plants are you most \_\_\_\_\_?
3. Which plants \_\_\_\_\_ the fewest resources?
4. Do you think we should \_\_\_\_\_ weeding?

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### 5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "Gardening is a fight between man and nature."
- "There are good reasons for weeding."
- "All plants are beautiful, including weeds."
- "All gardens should be allowed to grow wild."

### 6 In your own words

a. Create a field guide with at least two examples of weeds that grow where you live. You can use an app or online resources to identify them. Complete the table below with information about each plant that you choose.

|                                                    | Weed 1: | Weed 2: |
|----------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|
| drawing/image                                      |         |         |
| description of roots, stem, leaves, flowers        |         |         |
| environment in which it grows (soil, light, water) |         |         |
| insect and animal life around it                   |         |         |
| other facts                                        |         |         |
| how/where it might be found in a garden            |         |         |

b. Report your findings to the class.