

WWE(ED) SmackDown

A tactical plan for enticing the next generation to help weed the garden.

BY MAUREEN L. EGAN

Issue: R Home Sept/Oct 2008

Just when I thought it was safe to return to the backyard, I went outside. Big mistake. Cue the creepy music — something along the lines of the theme from *Jaws* — but screechier and scratchier, too. Perhaps you heard my blood-curdling screams, my pathetic thrashing and flailing about as the weeds attacked me at dusk. Getting eaten by a shark would be less painful than waging war against the enemies that massed against me while I was on vacation. I was away only 10 days, yet the after-effects of nobody weeding and nobody watering have me contemplating violence.

I want to strangle and choke and stab. In the words of soft-spoken, peace-loving Arlo Guthrie, “I want to kill.” Weeds, that is. Invasive vines, too. I’m not a violent person. I’ve never owned a weapon or even so much as played a violent video game, but I’m starting to think that weeding is warfare and I need to institute a draft. Haven’t found any volunteers for this army, though.

Defeating weeds takes ingenuity along with the backbreaking labor. I’ve only skimmed *The Art of War*, but I know that “divide and conquer” is a stratagem that works in war and yards. I’m always trying to take this hill or secure that perimeter using daylilies or spiderwort or coneflowers, since the more of them, the fewer the weeds. But it’s not enough to combat the enemies that are closing in fast. I need more foot soldiers.

I know that some of what we call weeds are native plants or wildflowers, but if they’re strangling my trees and undermining my mulch, don’t expect me to welcome them with open arms. Expect hand-to-hand combat. As Sun Tzu in *The Art of War* says, “On desperate ground, fight.”

To enlist the younger generation in yard work, I’m going to need an approach that makes doing yard work fit their high-tech lifestyle. Throwing money at them is so last millennium: I aim to transform the drudgery of weeding into entertainment. First, I’ll create a video game series that makes killing Creeping Charlie or poison ivy hip. Then when the buzz is strong, I’ll develop a reality show that makes weeding the next it thing. Calling it “Weed” probably assures me high initial sales.

Choose your avatar, your weapon, your chosen field, so to speak, and go. Cut away at the ivy climbing the trees, use a flamethrower (of sorts) to kill weeds on gravel paths, blast away with the backpack sprayer as the weeds reproduce before your eyes. The sound effects need to be good — lots of shrieking, screaming and gasping. Of course, the visual effects need to recreate the feeling of hopelessness and terror as the crabgrass locks onto your hand with a

vise-like grip. And mistakenly zapping the prized phlox is a major blow to your score. Gardening already has many competitive elements (and no, I've never won yard of the month), so this just takes it to the next level.

Once enough people are hooked on virtual reality weeding, it's time for me to promote my yard as the ultimate reality game: "Wild Weed Camp: Stratford Hills Edition. You've played the game, now kick it up a notch and put your skills to the tests of real weeds, actual inaccessible hillsides, genuine snakes and mosquitoes." It's not that much of a stretch. I'll even provide uniforms. There'd be team competitions — speed weeding — and throwing darts poisoned with glyphosate (better known as Round-Up) at dandelions. Extra points for snake bites, twisted ankles and scaring off the feral cats. People pay real money to play paintball and laser tag, and there's nothing to show after all that. I'm offering all this terrain and actual killing for free!

It would help the cause mightily if I could add sound effects to my yard. If a weed dies in a forest and no one hears it, no kid would believe it. Without sound, there is no cause-effect relationship anymore. Hear the poisoned ivy writhing in agony. Listen to the gasps for nitrogen when the grapevine is ripped from the ground. Withstand the withering remarks of the Japanese honeysuckle taunting the combatants. Sounds like great TV to me. I'd love to be able to watch — just watch. From inside, on the couch.