Factsheet

Protected Cropping – Weed Management

Weed control in greenhouses is particularly important;

- High value leaf crops are prone to weed issues
- Improved climate increases weed growth and competition for water and nutrients
- There are limited options for mechanical weed control.
- Pests, viruses and other diseases, hosted by weeds, can be transferred to many typical greenhouse crops.

However weeds can provide functional biodiversity and since complete elimination is virtually impossible, priorities at busy times should be

- Removal before seed set
- Maintaining leaf crops for efficient picking
- Zero tolerance on any which propagate via roots, such as couch grass, docks, bindweed and creeping thistle.

Mulching
The need to reduce labour costs combined with use of dripper pipes (which can impede effective hoeing) has resulted in most growers planting through plastic ground cover. This has the added benefit of reducing soil moisture loss. Where plastic mulch is not used crops should be grown in rows to aid hoeing. Minimum tillage or no dig systems tend to mulch generously with layers of organic matter helping to suppress annual weeds but perennial weeds can become an issue if not diligently removed.

Minimising plastic waste

1. Use biodegradable mulch
2. Use durable woven polypropylene in which holes are pre-made. It can then be reused for over a decade if well looked after (although disease transfer may be an issue where a limited range of crops are grown).

Flame weeding is an effective way of removing the 'fuzz' of weedlings that can appear in direct sown crops. Rarely any use on faster germinating crops such as the crucifers; it can be used, with careful timing, on slower varieties such as carrot and onion, where the weeds are flamed just before the crop emerges.

Foam or hot water weeding can be effective around hard to reach areas and initial trials are showing promise for cleaning and sterilizing, glass and tunnel plastic

Factsheet

Other publications in the protected cropping series

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Crop Timings

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