



Have you ever walked by a shrub that looked like it was covered with spaghetti? No, it's not cloudy with a chance of meatballs – the plant is infected with a weed called Dodder. Dodder is a parasitic vine that is extremely difficult to eradicate. What is a parasitic vine? It's a weed that depends on a host plant for all of its needs.

How to Identify Dodder

To spot Dodder, look for long, slender, thread like stems that kind of look like spaghetti. It may also have bell shaped flowers that are cream colored. Dodder is a tricky weed because it grows and branches out to nearby plants very easily. Because of this ability, it often looks like a matted mess covering up a whole plant. The more vines there are, the more energy that is removed from the host plant. The loss of nutrients to the Dodder combined with the loss of light from the matted weeds can cause major damage to the host plant.

Dodder Challenges

One of the biggest challenges with Dodder is its seeds. Dodder is a flowering plant and its flowers will produce thousands of seeds which, when mature, will fall to the soil below. The seeds have a very hard coat around them and stay dormant in the soil until the right conditions come around to sprout. When it comes to getting rid of a Dodder infestation, it is the seeds that cause the greatest headache, which is why prevention is so important.



Removal

At the first sign of Dodder, pull it off the plant and throw it away. Check the infestation site often because the weed may quickly regrow so it's important to keep pulling. If you see Dodder soon after it has attached itself to a host, prune the infected portion of the host plant 1/8 to 1/4 inch below the point of the attachment, otherwise the dodder can regenerate. If the Dodder is attached to a shrub or tree, pruning is only helpful if it is confined to one or two branches. Removing any more than that will most likely cause major damage to the host shrub or tree.

Because Dodder is extremely difficult to destroy once it has taken over a plant, it is important to try to end the growth cycle. Use a pre-emergent herbicide like oryzaline that, when added to the soil under the infested plants, will kill the seed before it grows. Currently, there are no post-emergent herbicides that kill dodder without also killing the host plant. If the infestation is completely unmanageable, removal of the host plant with its attached dodder may be the easiest solution.

