

Have you ever walked past a shrub that looked like it was covered in spaghetti? No, it's not *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*—it's a weed called **Dodder**. Dodder is a parasitic vine that's extremely difficult to control. But what does "parasitic" even mean in this case? Simply put, it's a weed that survives by attaching itself to a host plant and drawing out its nutrients.

## How to Identify Dodder

Dodder is easy to spot once you know what to look for. Its long, slender, threadlike stems resemble strands of spaghetti. You may also notice small, bell-shaped, cream-colored flowers, too. Dodder grows quickly, branching out and wrapping itself around nearby plants. Because it spreads so easily, it often creates a tangled mat that can smother entire shrubs.

The more vines present, the more energy and nutrients the host plant loses. Combined with the reduced sunlight caused by dodder's thick cover, the host can suffer severe damage.

## Why Dodder is a Challenge

One of the biggest challenges with handling dodder is its seeds. Each plant produces thousands of seeds that fall to the soil below. These seeds are coated with a tough outer shell, allowing them to remain dormant until conditions are just right for sprouting.



Because of this, dodder infestations are difficult to eliminate. Once seeds are in the soil, they can create new problems for years to come. That's why prevention is critical.

## How to Remove Dodder

At the first sign of dodder, pull it off the plant and discard it. Check the area often—dodder can regrow quickly, so persistence matters.

If the weed has only recently attached to its host, prune the infected portion of the plant about 1/8 to 1/4 inch below the attachment point. Otherwise, the dodder can regenerate. For shrubs or trees, pruning works only if the infestation is limited to one or two branches; removing more than that can seriously harm the host.

Since dodder is so difficult to destroy once established, interrupting its growth cycle is key. Applying a pre-emergent herbicide, such as Oryzalin, to the soil beneath infested plants will kill seeds before they sprout. Currently, there are no post-emergent herbicides that kill dodder without also killing the host plant.

If the infestation is too severe to manage, removing the entire host plant—dodder and all—may be the most effective solution.

