

May 1, 2020
Spring Weeds

The world has greened up! Instead of watching the Kentucky Derby horse race this spring I got to actively participate in and watch the flowerbed weed race. I can just imagine how that race might be called. First out of the gate is chickweed. Chickweed, chickweed has taken the early lead. Germinated from seed last fall, it has spent the winter chomping at the bit and its spring surge of growth cannot be matched. It is way out in front, growing low to the ground and spreading to try to put a halt to any of its rivals' chances of getting sunlight.

Coming in just behind chickweed and growing neck and neck are marestail and purple deadnettle, two other fall germinating weeds. Purple dead nettle has now taken second place, edging out the marestail by a nose as it shoots up to catch the sun's rays. This purple leaf tinged member of the mint family is stretching its square stem and has now leaped above the chickweed in height but does not match the plant in girth covering the ground. Marestail is lagging in third.

Purple dead nettle is now pulling up. Small light purple tubular flowers are jutting out from under the leaves as this plant ends its life cycle in June and produces several thousand seeds per plant in good track conditions. Purple dead nettle is out of the race but poised to make a strong comeback this fall.

There is a tremendous commotion in the crowd as the early favorite, chick weed has slowed! Small clusters of white flowers with five daisy-like petals are now visible on the plant. Seed pods are emerging as the plant's growth has come to halt. And it looks, ladies and gentlemen like the plant is dying. It is late spring and this winter annual has completed its development but not before it has littered the bed with about 25,000 thousand seeds in anticipation of next year's race. Depending on the severity of next winter this plant may be back. A cold winter may kill next falls geminated seeds but there is no need to worry, it will be back in the competition as some seeds can lay in the soil 18 years before germinating.

Marestail is in it for the long hall. As we head down the stretch, this five-foot plant is now packed with 50,000 seeds that can emerge this fall or next spring making it a long-term threat. Marestail is an apt name because plants have a single, unbranched stems cloaked in willow-like leaves.

It is world renown not only as a competitor in your landscape, but also in crop fields though out Indiana. It is a tough plant to beat.

As marestail crosses the finish line cold fall weather ends its life. By now a plant that started life looking like it might be a desirable flower, has demonstrated its true face as a dreaded weed, and the long-rooted nemesis has been pulled with much sweat from the race.

I would have rather watched the Kentucky Derby, but even then, those weeds were still waiting on me. Did I mention all this was taking place in my flowerbeds? You could call all this weed competition a different kind of "The Run for the Roses".