

## Circle hoe runs rings around other weeders

Arizona gardening

Mary Irish, Dec. 4, 2004

Although there has been some rain this fall, it may not be enough to bust the persistent drought. As I write, it is gently raining... these rains are also the trigger that releases the hordes of weeds waiting underground for a slight cooling and a bit of wet to germinate...

I generally find weeding a gentle, reflective chore that can be a delightful way to connect with the small, intimate aspects of the garden. But in a good wet year, you need more help, and ***I am happy to share the burden with one of my favorite tools - the circle hoe.***

I found the first of my three circle hoes at a high-end gadget store. It was an odd-looking thing, with a sturdy wooden handle and a heavy, metal circular end piece attached at an unusual angle. The interior edge is sharpened to a cutting edge. I am always looking for great tools that do not require cords, batteries or noise, and this one looked promising. ***I found it to be the best weeding device since fingers.***

Unlike many hoes, this one works with only a pull motion, and the odd blade design does two things at once: It slices off the weeds right at the soil line, and it does not disrupt or plow the ground as it works.

***It is a gentle tool, taking only what you want gone, and leaving the rest.*** Despite its bulky appearance, it can be guided between small plants and does not damage the stems or bark of nearby perennials or shrubs as you weed. The clever design allows you to nest the tool right up to the edge of the plant so that even with difficult plants such as cactus and agaves, you can reach beneath them and yank out a stubborn weed seedling.

My initial circle hoe is the 15-inch version, but there are two other sizes. The 11-inch hoe has a tiny head that is superb around delicate plants or in crowded beds. ***I use it to clear out around plants as small as emerging vegetables and wildflowers, and it excels in weeding around bulbs.*** After I found the stand-up 59-inch hoe to clear out large areas of annual grasses, I put away the dreaded hula hoe. I have always found this tool difficult and awkward, with its flapping head snagging on rocks and spraying an avalanche of dust all around.

Ralph Henningsen, an inventor and frustrated gardener, created the circle hoe in 1997... if you have a gardener or a weeder on your list or if you want to adjust your own attitude to weeding, look for a circle hoe. ***Henningsen's odd little hoe changed my weeding life; it might change yours as well.***

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