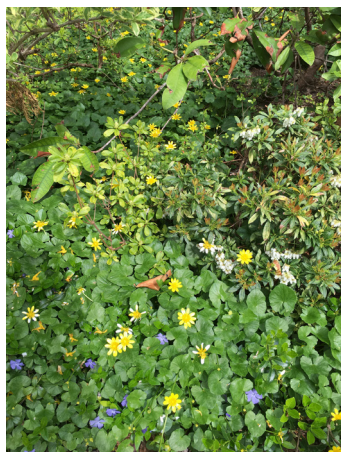


# GARDEN THUGS



Marsh marigold and vinca encroaching on an andromeda shrub.



Lily of the valley swallowing up lady's mantle with hellebores above. Note the yucca in the background which is overtaking the hydrangea in front of it.



Roadside daylillies and more marsh marigold.

**Don't you just love that expression? Another one often used in relation to Garden Thugs is "escaped to the wild." That is what Garden Thugs do—they escape to the wild. Who cares if the thugs escape? Well, maybe we all should, once we take a long look at how these tough guys damage our gardens and our native habitat.**

Let's take a trip down the garden path, and really examine these scoundrels. What is a Garden Thug, you say? Well, it can be different things to different people. And a wonderful groundcover we simply adore can turn into a thug, once left to grow at will. These garden terrors are capable of growing so vigorously that they obliterate those other kindlers, gentler plants as they spread without abandon. Many of these determined plants are doing a great job of covering dirt—UNTIL the day you realize you've lost that irreplaceable campanula that came from your mother's garden, many years ago. POOF—it's gone, run down by a thug!

So now that you are aware of just how these bullies operate, let's review just a few of them that you may already know. This month, we will touch on those plants in the groundcover category, and next month we will continue with vines and shrubs.

Lesser celandine or marsh marigold lights up early spring with cheery golden daisy-like flowers. It grows rampantly where water is plentiful, and then when you get ready to remove it, it dies off and disappears...until next year, when it will have spread over even more ground. Another spring bloomer, the simple violet, in purple or white, invades everyone's lawn and literally shoots out seeds for new plants to sprout. Since they have a tap root, they cannot be removed without digging. Many find it hard to believe that lily of the valley could be included with these other hooligans, as it takes years to establish, but once it does—WATCH OUT! Years ago, I fell for the beauty of goutweed or bishop's weed and had to pay the price. Its beautiful variegated foliage is deciduous, and it creeps its way into everything in its path.

In my opinion, the champion of thugs, the villain who will win out each and every time, is the chameleon plant. I pity those who cannot resist its unique combination of green leaves tipped with yellow and red and simple white flowers. I must warn you that this plant cannot be eradicated and will take over your entire garden if you let it. One estate I worked on had beds overtaken, trampling yards in every direction, growing through perennials and shrubs alike. Nothing stopped it. The reason chameleon plant is so hard to destroy lies in its root system, which breaks easily, so any tiny piece of root will just grow into a new plant. I find it hard to believe that nurseries are allowed to sell this. Consider yourself forewarned!

Here is a sampling of others who belong in this category: the tawny or roadside daylily with its orange flowers in summer, purple loosestrife (most any plant with the name loosestrife), which has taken over upstate and New England areas, spearmint and peppermint, yucca, and the two most commonly overplanted—Vinca or periwinkle, and English ivy.

It is most probable that you have a few of these rambunctious rambblers lurking in your garden, attempting a takeover, of sorts. My advice? Take a walk through your property now before the heat of summer ramps up thug growth. Do what you see fit to tame those savage beasts—trim, dig up, or remove those vulnerable neighboring plants, and allow them to do what they are set out to do—cover the earth!



*Karen Marks has been a Huntington Bay resident for the past 19 years. A passionate gardener with a gift for design, Karen has been creating in varied facets — store design, kitchen design, and garden design. She is also an active member of the Huntington Historical Society and Rescue Coordinator for Springer Spaniel Rescue (ESSCLI). You can visit her website at [www.compleatgarden.com](http://www.compleatgarden.com).*