

## Common Chickweed *Stellaria media*

Common chickweed is a plant of Eurasian origin that is now located almost world-wide. It is a broadleaf annual or winter annual succulent plant that reproduces by seeds and creeping stems that root at the nodes. Common chickweed is a weed of fields, gardens, lawns, flower beds, ornamental plants, and other areas with rich soils. Common chickweed is a member of the pink or carnation family, *Caryophyllaceae*, genus *Cerastium*.



Several chickweeds in this genus are found world-wide and differ from common chickweed in being more or less hairy all over. Field chickweed (*C. arvense* L.) and mouseear chickweed (*C. vulgatum* L.) are perennials. Sticky chickweed (*C. viscosum* L., also called *C. glomeratum* Thiull.) is an annual.



While the plants can grow upright, they more commonly form 4- to 12-inch high prostrate mats. The bright green, hairless leaves are typically rounded, tapering to a point at the tip. Leaves may reach up to one inch or more in length and are in opposite pairs along the stems. Leaf petioles are hairy and may be lacking on upper leaves. Main stems and branches have a conspicuous line of hairs along one side.

The ¼-inch flowers are star-shaped, with five white petals that are deeply notched at the tips. Flowers are present at all times except the dead of winter. The flowers close at night and open in the morning. They also close when it's about to rain. Possibly they respond to changes in air pressure. Chickweed also reacts to nightfall by folding its leaves over the growing tip to protect it. The flowers develop into small capsule-like fruits, which contain many tiny seeds (up to 15,000 per plant). The seeds generally germinate within a few years, but can remain viable for much longer.



Common chickweed grows vigorously in cool weather, producing seeds throughout the winter in mild regions. In the Inland Northwest it grows quite well when there are mild winter conditions.

Common chickweed has a mild, refreshing flavor and can be used as a food. The leaves and stems can be added to salads, cooked as greens, or added to anything you might add greens to. The seeds are also edible. It is best harvested in the spring and can also be dried for storage. Over-consumption of this plant may cause diarrhea.

Common chickweed has also been prepared as a tea for medicinal purposes since medieval times. Chickweed is tonic, diuretic, demulcent, expectorant, and mildly laxative. It's often recommended for asthma, bronchitis, or congestion. The benefits of chickweed may be the result of its high nutritional

value, especially the presence of gamma-linolenic acid (GLA). The medicinal effects of this fatty acid read much like the value ascribed to chickweed. Externally, chickweed relieves itching and inflammation and is generally soothing and moisturizing. It can be used for minor skin infections or irritations and is an ingredient in a number of commercial skin care products. This common plant has yet to be thoroughly scientifically studied. Proper care should be used to positively identify this plant before using it as a food source or for medical purposes.

Effective weed management, in addition to hand pulling, is to apply organic mulches such as bark, compost, grass clippings, straw and other materials in a layer two to several inches thick. Also, maintain a healthy planting or turf area to provide competition to prevent weed establishment.

There are herbicides that are labeled for control of this weed in landscape, turf and bare ground areas. Herbicide selection depends on site. 2,4-D + MCPP + dicamba can be used in lawn areas. Glyphosate products should be used as spot treatments only. Always read and follow label instructions on products that are selected and used.

Resources:

Weeds of the West

Hortsense—<http://pep.wsu.edu/hortsense/>

[http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/WEEDS/common\\_chickweed.html](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/WEEDS/common_chickweed.html)