

Common mallow

Malva neglecta

Common mallow originated in Europe and has long been present in North America. It is a common weed in waste areas, gardens, landscapes, cultivated land and occasionally a problem in new lawns. It can be an annual, winter annual (depending on location), or biennial plant.

Common mallow has stems that originate from a deep tap root and are low-spreading with branches reaching from a few inches to almost two feet long. Leaves are palmately veined, with the veins originating at the petiole and radiating outward, $\frac{3}{4}$ to $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. The leaves are nearly circular in outline, with a heart-shaped base and five to seven rounded lobes.



The flowers are borne either singly or in clusters in the leaf axils and are formed in mid summer. Each blossom has five white or pinkish lavender petals with notched tips. The petals are about twice the length of the sepals (the green, leaf-like structures which enclose the bud). Seeds are borne in smooth, round flattened, button-like fruits, which break into single-seeded segments at maturity. The seed shape is where this plant gets its common name of buttonweed or cheeseweed.

Common mallow is often confused with ground ivy and common violets. A study of the leaves will identify the differences between these plants. Common mallow has round leaves with narrow, toothed leaf margins and leaf veins radiating in straight lines from the stem. Ground ivy has kidney shaped leaves with broad, rounded leaf margins and leaf veins more branched. Common violet's leaves are heart-shaped, which is the main identification feature of this plant, and pointed at the apex. Another way to tell the difference between ground ivy and common mallow is to look at the stems. Ground ivy is a member of the Mint family and has square stems. Common mallow is a member of the Mallow family and has round stems. If there is still some confusion identifying ground ivy from common mallow look at the roots. Ground ivy spreads by its square stems that root at the nodes. Common mallow spreads by stems rooting at the nodes and there is always a straight taproot.

Common mallow has been used for medicinal purposes. It is not as well known as its cousin, marsh mallow, but has similar therapeutic effects. It has also been used in the kitchen. The leaves can be added to a salad, the fruit used as a substitute for capers, and the flowers used to tint cotton candy.

Cultivation (rototilling or hoeing) will eliminate common mallow plants, especially if the entire plant and root is destroyed. Careful digging is useful to manage weed populations. However, digging can carry undesirable seeds to the surface and foster further germination. Dense turf stands resist mallow invasion, so good turf management is the key to controlling this weed in turf.

There are several herbicides listed for control of this weed. In landscape areas, glyphosate (Roundup) and glufosinate products (Finale) should be applied as spot treatments only. In turf areas 2,4-D + MCPP + dicamba is recommended. In bare ground areas glyphosate can be used. As always, apply any herbicide according to label directions.

Resources:

Weeds of the West

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

http://www.css.orst.edu/weeds/Common_mallow/biology.html

WeedAlert.com—http://www.weedalert.com/weed_pages/wa_common_mallow.htm

University of Illinois @ Urbana-Champaign Turf grass Program—

http://www.turf.uiuc.edu/weed_web/descriptions/mallow.htm

<http://www.angelfire.com/il2/purpleflame/Herbs/commmall.html>