

Creeping Bellflower *Campanula rapunculoides*



Well, another one has gone over the wall, the garden wall in this case. Weed lists are full of escaped ornamentals, and Creeping bellflower (*Campanula rapunculoides*) is one of the many. Looking at its violet-blue bell shaped flowers, you can understand why someone would plant it in their yard. It's that rare plant that can tolerate, even thrive in shade. Many of its cousins in the Campanula family are still used widely, but this weed puts the "creep" in creeping. Not content to stay in one spot, Creeping bellflower wanders wherever it can send its roots. It has both shallow fibrous roots, and deeper growing horizontal fleshy roots that almost resemble a tuber.

When digging this weed, it is quite common to pull the shallow roots, and think the job is done, but see it grow back readily from the reserves in the deeper roots. It isn't uncommon to find roots as deep as six inches.

To make matters worse, this perennial spreads by seed too; an average plant produces 3000-15,000 seeds annually.

Creeping bellflower often starts with a cluster of heart-shaped leaves all coming from one point. The leaves may be hairy or smooth. As it matures, it sends up a bloom stalk two to four feet tall; the leaves on this stalk tend to grow a little narrower, with pointed tips. They alternate up the stem, with flowers growing out of the axils.



Creeping bellflower is not a problem in most areas. In fact, it is not listed as a noxious weed anywhere in the US despite being found in almost every state. It doesn't grow in the deep South, from Florida to South Carolina, west to Oklahoma. California and Arizona are also free of this minor scourge.

Why then do we consider it a weed worth mentioning? It turns out it can be a real problem in parks, golf courses and home lawns. It can adapt to life in the lawn by surviving even low mowing heights. While it cannot bloom in turf, it does continue to spread underground. The leaves grow densely enough that combined with the roots; this weed can take over whole patches of lawn. It's one that we still see homeowners complaining about and trying to control.

Creeping bellflower can be controlled with glyphosate (found in Roundup), but this will kill grass as well. It is resistant to 2,4-D unless combined with MCPP. Herbicides containing dicamba are the most effective at killing the weed without damaging the lawn. Timing can be important, so apply herbicides in late spring or early fall. As always, read and follow the label of any and all pesticides you are using.

Sources:

Weeds of the West, 9th edition, Tom Whitson, ed., The Western Society of Weed Science, 2000

Montana State University, Crop and Weed Science, Fabian Menalled, revised 2004.
<http://scarab.msu.montana.edu/CropWeedSearch/Docs/CreepingBellflower.htm>.

University of Alaska website,
akweeds.uaa.alaska.edu/pdfs/species_bios_pdfs/Species_bios_CARA.pdf

University of Minnesota extension, Yard and Garden briefs, John Masengarb.
<http://www.extension.umn.edu/yardandgarden/ygbriefs/h508bellflower.html>

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Plants Database
<http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=CARA>