

Purslane

Portulaca oleracea



It is easy to mistake purslane for a nice little succulent that would make a good groundcover. It has smooth, reddish, fleshy stems up to 1-foot long that branch out from a taproot to form a dense mat with thick, green, succulent leaves in the shape of a tear drop. The leaves are about ½ -inch long, alternate or nearly opposite, often in clusters at the tips of stems. The leaf tips are slightly rounded, the edges are smooth, and the petioles are absent. Tiny, pale yellow flowers, with usually five petals, are located in axils of leaves and at stem tips. They open only on sunny mornings.

Common purslane is an annual broadleaf weed whose seed requires warm temperatures to germinate, so it shows up after you are through with your spring weeding. It grows best on rich, moist, sandy loam and in open habitat, but grows well on many types of soil. In the shade the plant will grow more upright to about 1-foot high and will have fewer leaves. It is a common weed of gardens, lawns, waste areas, cultivated fields, eroded slopes, and barren driveways.

Purslane is distributed throughout the US and southern Canada. Native Americans were known to have grown purslane in their gardens. Purslane is high in Vitamins A, C, and E. Choose leaves of young plants to eat. Older or stressed plants should be avoided, since they may accumulate oxalates and edibility decreases.

When removing purslane, handle a mature plant gently. The calyxes that surround the flower are green and encase the petals, forming seed capsules that contain numerous tiny black seeds. They split open across the center allowing the top half to fall off like a lid. These fall off very easily and you can see them on the ground after you have removed the plant. Seeds of the plant can remain viable for many years, up to 40 years if buried. So try to remove the plant before it starts producing seed. Seeds ripen 14 to 16 days after the blossoms open, even if the plant has been pulled.



Young plants can be pulled or hoed, removing all plant parts so they do not resprout. Seedlings can be covered with a dense mulch to smother them. As for chemical treatment on young plants and seedlings, a spot treatment of glyphosate (Roundup, Kleenup) or glufosinate (Finale) can be used on bare ground areas or in landscaped areas. In these same areas pre-emergent herbicides like oryzalin (Surflan) and dichlobenil (Casoron) may also be used. In turf areas 2,4-D + dicamba (Weedmaster) or 2,4-D + MCPP + dicamba can be used but be *extremely careful* using dicamba above the roots of any trees or shrubs. All chemicals should be used with careful attention given to label instructions.