

May 30, 2018

SNEAKY WEEDS, Part 2  
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In SNEAKY WEEDS published here in October 2017, we discussed invasive weeds that rise up in lawn, ground cover, or low ornamentals - initially establishing themselves close to the ground. In this article, we will examine clever weeds whose camouflage is “pasture grass” or which grow on the verge of civilization.

Downy brome (*Bromus tectorum*)

Also called cheatgrass, this is an annual grass both in sagebrush rangelands and pine woodland. Cheatgrass is spread by seeds only but has tremendous production with potentially 300 seeds per plant, which can remain dormant for two to three years even in extremely hot soils. Cheatgrass changes the frequency, timing and extent of wildland fire by maturing early as a fine-textured herbage which ignites easily and colonizes readily in late summer and in fall. It's most effectively controlled by biological suppression (planting fall perennials) which crowd it out.

Catchweed bedstraw (*Galium aparine*)

Commonly known as the velcro plant hereabouts, this is a member of the Madder family. It's an annual, native to North America but a weed in our California gardens. In agriculture, it can become a host for problematic nematodes, insects and disease pests. You may have tangled with it because it will stick to your clothing, even your bare hands. It has square stems, leaves are whorled with 6 to 8 in each leaf section and each stem can sprawl up to 3-1/3 feet long. Frost tolerant, it germinates mid-December and again in the spring. A fast growing plant, it not only steals nutrients and water, it can smother other desirable plants if left unchecked. It can sicken livestock and become stuck in pets' fur. However, it is easy to pull up by hand in the spring. (Mowing it causes it to grow even more prolifically.) Flowering in late spring to mid-summer, pull it before it flowers and produces seeds (anywhere from 100 to 3,000 seeds in some plants). It has been used in the past for bedding material from which it gets its common name. Short of using it for that, it's best to pull and toss out as soon as you notice it.

Filaree (*Erodium species*)

An annual broad-leaf plant in the same family as geraniums, this is a weed with pink or lavender flowers of 5 petals. There are 7 species in California, only one of which is native (to the desert, not our foothills). They differ in height and the color of the stems but they all have the same seed structure which you may have played with as a child. What did you call its pointed spike... Stork's bill? Birthday candles? Swords? Scissors? The spikes are its fruit which when dry separate into 5 seed bodies with a top at a right angle to the corkscrew middle, the seed at the bottom. The coiled seed structure shrinks and expands with changes in humidity which causes it to twist, drilling the seed right into the ground! The invasive red stemmed species, *Erodium cicutarium*, blooms from February to June, and is found in El Dorado County up to 6,600 ft in elevation. It grows in a rosette pattern close to the ground. Since it spreads by seed, keeping this plant from fruiting is one way of controlling it. Pulling the plant by hand, hoeing it, if in larger areas, and disposing of the plant before the flowers produce their fruit are effective controls.

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Puncturevine (*Tribulus terrestris*)

Otherwise known as goathead, this summer annual is a prostrate mat producing many burs with spines so sharp they can puncture a bicycle tire. (We think that it looks like a miniature and very spiky little Death Star.) It's toxic to livestock, especially sheep, when eaten in quantity. It's particularly painful when caught in the vulnerable spaces between a dog's toes. Invasive throughout the state up to about 3,300 feet, Puncturevine is often found in areas with high soil compaction and reproduces by seed - lucky because you can eradicate it at any point up to seeding.

Avoid broad-spectrum herbicides when you attempt to eradicate a specific weed because you don't want to kill all plants or hurt insect pollinators or insects whose diet includes plant pests. If you spray, use a targeted spray, apply it according to package instructions and protect ornamentals from "drift."

Need a quick photo identification? Check out <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/WEEDS/> for an invasive weed photo gallery - complete with description of plant stages, color photos, habitat and elevation where found, and links to other researched websites. Investigate the whole library of Master Gardener articles at [ucanr.edu/mgeldorfado](http://ucanr.edu/mgeldorfado) under Articles and Archived Articles

The upcoming public education class will be on "Control of Invasive and Noxious Weeds Common in El Dorado County," taught on Saturday, June 2, 9:00 a.m. to noon at Government Center, Bldg C - Hearing Room, 2850 Fairlane Ct, Placerville. "2<sup>nd</sup> Saturdays with Barry" continues on June 9, 10:00 a.m. to noon at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, 6699 Campus Drive, Placerville. Herbs, edible flowers, and a salsa garden will be this month's topics!

Sherwood Demonstration Garden is open Fridays and Saturdays, 9am to noon, 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville. Note: Folsom Lake College charges \$2 dollars for parking (see parking kiosks).

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorfado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at [http://ucanr.edu/mastergardener e-news](http://ucanr.edu/mastergardener-e-news). You can also find us on Facebook.