

Common Chickweed

Stellaria media



Quick Facts: Common Chickweed (*Stellaria media*) is a low-growing, winter annual plant. Seeds can germinate any time of the year, but most do so in the fall or early spring. Plants that germinate in the fall lay dormant over winter and grow vigorously in the springtime. Trailing stems form dense mats that can outcompete young plants. Common Chickweed is most commonly a problem species for small grains, alfalfa, and no- or low-tillage crop systems. It can also invade yards, home gardens, and early-stage wildlife plantings. It is a host plant for crop pests including soybean cyst nematode, lygus bugs, and thrips. Common Chickweed may take multiple years to eradicate, and some seeds in the soil remain viable for up to 30 years. It is found most often in moist, nitrogen-rich soils. It has historically been consumed by humans and livestock. However, when grown in nitrogen-rich soil it may contain high levels of nitrites, which can be toxic.

Invasion Strategy: Common Chickweed reproduces via seed. Individual plants produce an average of 25,000 seeds each. Plants mature quickly, and can germinate, flower, and set seed within 5-7 weeks. Seeds are spread by wildlife, people, or farm equipment. Multiple plant generations can occur per year.

Identifying Features: Common Chickweed grows up to 12 inches tall with long trailing stems that root along the ground, forming a dense mat of vegetation.

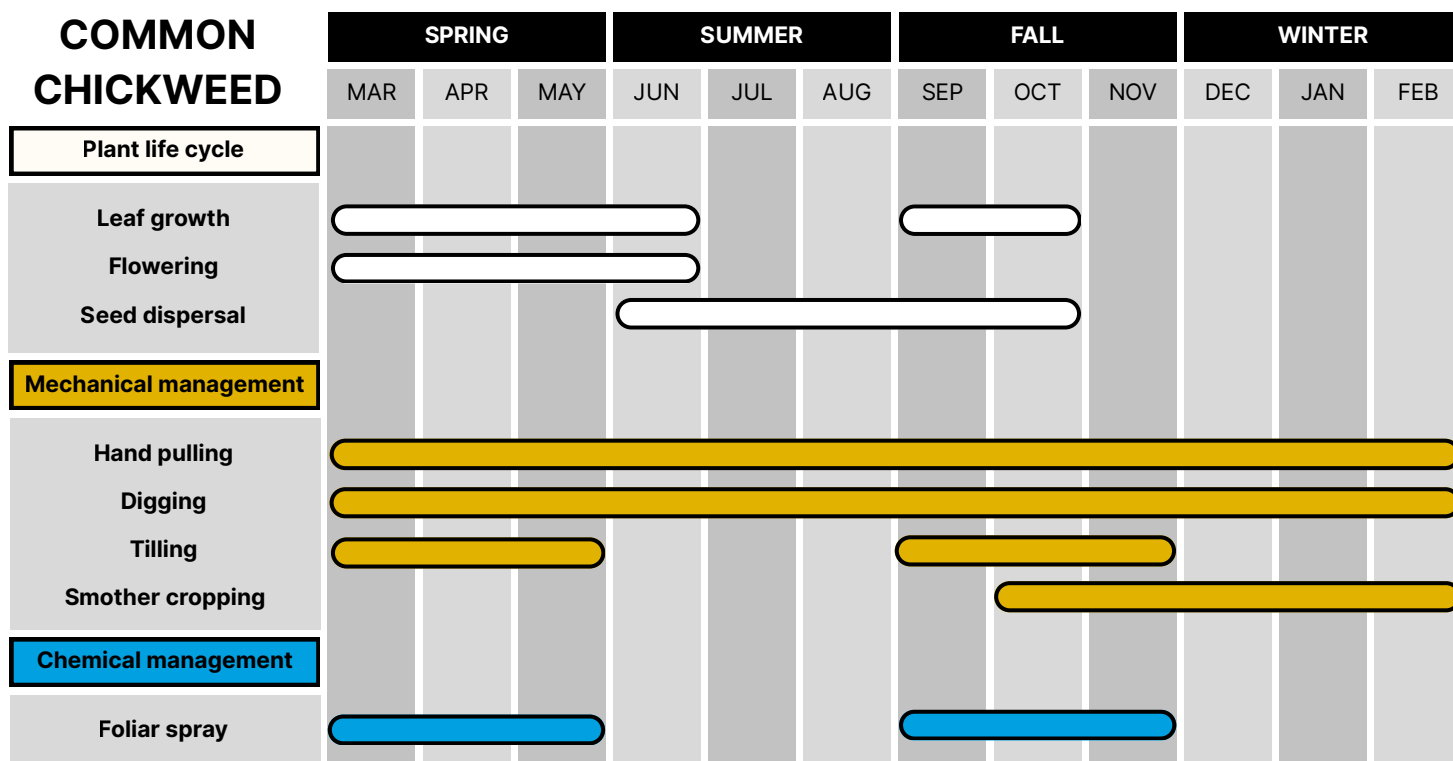
- Branching stems grow 3-15 inches long.
- Stems are thin and limp.
- This plant often leans on other plants for support.
- Leaves are opposite one another on the stem, sessile towards the top and on petioles towards the base.
- Leaves are small, smooth-margined, and oval or heart-shaped, with pointy tips.
- Leaves sometimes have a succulent-like appearance.
- Flowers are small, white, and star-shaped, with 5 deeply lobed petals (giving the appearance of 10 petals).
- Reddish-brown seeds are contained inside a small, oval seed capsule.

[Further
Information
and
References](#)



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This chart is based on USDA plant hardiness zone 6. Plant growth and treatment times vary by region.

Management methods:

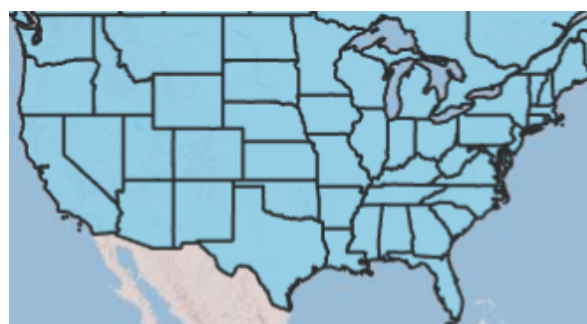
Mechanical - Common Chickweed is shallowly rooted and can be managed with repeated hand pulling or shallow tillage. It can be pulled or dug year-round, but tillage is most effective in the fall and spring, when plants are small. Remove plants before they flower and produce seed. Planting a dense smother crop in the winter can suppress seedling growth. Mowing is not recommended for this species because its low growth habit allows it to survive repeated mowing.

Chemical - Foliar applications of herbicide are most effective in spring and fall when plants are young and before they have produced seed. Both pre-emergent and post-emergent herbicides can be effective. Always follow label instructions.

Disclaimer - Selecting the best management method for this plant can be site and context-specific. Check with your local USDA Service Center or University Extension agent to explore your options and determine what is most appropriate for your location and situation.

Management information:

Clean tillage equipment to avoid spreading seed. Stems that remain in contact with soil can reroot - dispose of uprooted plants. Personal protective equipment is recommended when removing any invasive species, especially when using herbicides. Always follow label instructions when using herbicide.



■ Species present ■ Absent

Look-Alike Species:

- Apetalous Chickweed (*Stellaria pallida*), Greater Chickweed (*Stellaria neglecta*), and Giant Chickweed (*Myosoton aquaticum*).
- These other non-native species can be difficult to tell apart, but all are invasive and can be managed like Common Chickweed. Apetalous Chickweed has green flowers that lack petals (supplemental photo 1). Greater Chickweed (supplemental photo 2) tends to be larger than Chickweed and have more stamens (8-12 in Greater Chickweed compared to 3-8 in chickweed). Giant Chickweed is also larger than Common Chickweed with more stamens (10) and more styles (5 in Giant Chickweed compared to 3 in Common Chickweed).



Look-Alike Species:

- Tennessee Chickweed (*Stellaria corei*) and Star Chickweed (*Stellaria pubera*) (supplemental photo 4).
- These native Chickweeds also appear similar to Common Chickweed. Both native species are more often found in shady wooded areas, in comparison to the sunny, disturbed conditions that Common Chickweed prefers. Both native species tend to have sessile leaves (supplemental photo 3), especially towards the top of the plant, while Common Chickweed has leaves on petioles that become longer towards the base of the plant.



References and Additional Reading:

- Michigan State University. [2026 MSU Weed Control Guide](#). [chemical control information].
- Jepson herbarium. [Jepson eFlora Key Page for Stellaria](#). [lookalike plant information].
- Pennsylvania State University Extension. 2023. [Lawn and Turfgrass Weeds: Common Chickweed](#). [Identification and chemical control information].
- Purdue University. 2007. [Identification of Six Alternative Winter Annual Weed Hosts for Soybean Cyst Nematode](#). [Host plant information].
- Rutgers University Extension. 2022. [Common Chickweed](#). [Host plant information].
- SARE. 2021. [Chickweed, common in Manage Weeds on Your Farm](#). [Identification and mechanical control information].
- U.S. Forest Service. 2006. [Weed of the Week: Common Chickweed](#). [Identification and habitat information].
- West Virginia University Extension. 2020. [Common Chickweed](#). [Lifecycle, chemical, and mechanical management information].

Photo Credits: Photo 1: iNaturalist, mallaliev; Photo 2: Purdue University, Aaron J. Patton; Photo 3: MissouriPlants.com, S.R. Turner; Photo 4: Cornell University, Scott Morris; Range map: USDA PLANTS Database. Supplemental photo 1: iNaturalist, Darius Regnier. Supplemental photo 2: iNaturalist, Link Davis. Supplemental photo 3: iNaturalist, Tyson Gregory. Supplemental photo 4: iNaturalist, Emily L. Stanley

Resources:

- Find your local [University Extension Program](#)
- Find your local [USDA NRCS Service Center](#)
- Find your local [Soil and Water Conservation District](#)
- Check out other invasive plant fact sheets
- Check out Pollinator Partnership's agriculture page

Acknowledgements:

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