



Chickweed

Why is it a weed?

Can form dense stands in open areas

Where is it found?

Common in gardens and pastures nationwide

Is it toxic?

No

Other uses

Eaten by birds, grazing animals, nutritious leafy green for salads and other dishes



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ONE OF the most prolific weeds in my garden and pasture is common chickweed (*Stellaria media*).

It's a small annual plant that can germinate year-round but does so mostly in autumn. It happily grows and flowers through winter and early spring, and often dies out during hot, dry summers.

Chickweed is prized by chickens and other birds. Foragers love it too for its strong lettuce-like flavour that's great in salads. It's a commonly used green in many Asian dishes and a delicious substitute for basil in pesto.

So you might be wondering why I'm writing about this tasty plant in a column that's normally about pest plants.

The clue is in the second part of its name. In the right spot, chickweed forms large, thick mats of foliage that smother clover, grass, and other pasture seedlings.

It produces a lot of small seeds – up to 2500 seeds per plant – very quickly. Some seeds germinate within a few months, provided conditions are favourable, while thousands more can survive in the soil for years. Even if you control outbreaks before they set seed, it will take three years for the seed bank

to be reduced by 50% and almost 20 years to get rid of it.

How to control it

It's crucial to target chickweed before it flowers as it rapidly sets seed just after that.

It's easy to weed it out by hand in the garden as the stems and roots are quite weak.

You can help stop an infestation in pasture by preventing pugging damage over winter. You want healthy soils that can maintain a thick cover of grass and clover, which stops seeds from germinating.

If patches develop, one organic option is to cover it with a thick layer of mulch (at least 5cm deep), then resow with pasture in spring.

There are different chemical options depending on what crop the chickweed is infesting. Sprays containing flumetsulam (Valdo or Headstart) won't kill the surrounding grass and clovers.

Always read the label and seek professional advice before using herbicides. ■



NOTE: We recommend you get your own independent advice before you take any action on your block. Any action you take is strictly at your own risk.

About Gary

Gary Bosley works as PGG Wrightson's North Island technical specialist in agronomy. He and his family live on a 4ha lifestyle block south-east of Auckland. PGG Wrightson Ltd (PGW) does not warrant the information's accuracy, quality, outcome or fitness for any purpose.

