
Wildflower Spot – May 2014
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

WILD PEPPERGRASS

Lepidium virginicum

By Helen Hamilton, *Past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

This common lawn and roadside weed has tiny white 4-petaled flowers with 2-4 stamens arranged in elongated clusters at the ends of the stems. The distinctive seed capsules are flat, roundish, slightly notched and less than ¼ inch long. An annual, or sometimes biennial, Wild

Peppergrass grows 4-20 inches tall, with erect, highly branched stems. The basal leaves are stalked and deeply lobed, while the leaves on the stems are toothed and lance-shaped.

Blooming in April through June in dry soil with full sun in fields, roadsides, gardens and waste areas, Wild Peppergrass is found in all counties of Virginia and across the U.S. The introduced species Cow Cress (*L. campestre*) is also widespread across Virginia and the continent. The stems of Cow Cress are gray-green and densely covered with long, fine hairs, while the native

Wild Peppergrass has mostly smooth stems.

This prolific weed is one of the most common pepperweeds. Its seeds have a peppery taste and can be used to season soups and stews. A rich source of vitamin C, the young leaves are used in salads or cooked as greens. Folk medicine has found many uses for this plant – to treat scurvy, coughs, asthma, and rheumatic pain. The genus name is derived from the Greek for “little scale,” referring to the fruit. ❖



Photo: Wild Peppergrass (*Lepidium virginicum*) taken by Helen Hamilton
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