



# Catchweed bedstraw

## *Galium aparine* L.

L.C. Burrill

Catchweed bedstraw (*Galium aparine* L.), also called *bedstraw* or *cleavers*, is a native annual with weak, climbing, or twining stems, up to 6 feet long (figure 1). Whorls of six to eight narrow single-nerved leaves are attached to square stems (figure 2). Both stems and leaves have short backward-turning bristles that cause the plants to cling to other objects.

This clinging characteristic minimized matting when the plants were used as a mattress filling, giving rise to the name *bedstraw*. These same bristles also aid dispersal by attaching



Figure 1.—Catchweed bedstraw is a weak-stemmed annual that will cling to other plants.



Figure 2.—Leaves are in whorls around square stems.

to the hair or wool of passing animals or people's clothing.

Flowers are small, white, four-parted, and borne on short branches in the leaf axils (figure 3). Fruits of two nearly round halves, with one seed per half, are covered with fine hooked hairs.

Catchweed bedstraw and related plants are increasing as problems in cropland in the Pacific Northwest. The primary problem isn't competition with crops but difficulty in harvesting when bedstraw becomes tangled with the crop or equipment.

The plant is a nuisance when the fruits attach to clothing or to fur of pets. When heavily matted in wool of sheep, bedstraw reduces the value of the wool.

## RELATED SPECIES

**NORTHERN BEDSTRAW** (*Galium boreale* L.), which is native to the United States, differs from catchweed bedstraw in four ways:

- it's a perennial from rhizomes;
- it has leaves that are three-nerved and four to a whorl;
- it has stems that are more erect and don't cling; and
- hairs on its fruits may be straight, curled, or absent, but not hooked.

**CORN BEDSTRAW** (*Galium tricornis* L.) is an annual with five to eight leaves per whorl. Leaves have one nerve. Stems are under 2 feet long, and fruits are rough but not hairy.



Figure 3.—Small white flowers are borne on short branches in leaf axils.

Larry C. Burrill, Extension weed scientist, Oregon State University.

Corn bedstraw is native to Europe.

## CONTROL

Efforts to prevent bedstraw from invading cropland, gardens, or ornamental plantings deserve attention because the plant becomes established first in uncultivated areas such as fence rows, under trees, and in thickets bordering fields.

These plants must be controlled to reduce the number of seeds available for spread into fields. Ways of moving bedstraw seed that can be stopped include contaminated

crop seed, machinery, and livestock. Annual species are easy to pull from the soil to control a few plants in fields or ornamentals.

Rhizomes of northern bedstraw may be killed or weakened by repeated cultivation, but this isn't practical in most cropping systems.

**BIOLOGICAL.** No insects or disease agents are known to control this or related species. Currently, bedstraw doesn't cause enough economic loss to warrant a search for biological control agents.

**CHEMICAL.** In a few crops, current weed management seems to prevent bedstraw establishment. In other crops,

special controls have been found or are still being pursued.

Herbicide registrations change frequently; therefore, this publication doesn't contain specific herbicide uses. Registered herbicides are summarized each year in the *Pacific Northwest Weed Control Handbook*.

In addition, detailed instructions for herbicide use are provided on herbicide container labels and in other literature provided by herbicide manufacturers.

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Photos are by the author.

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