

Common Turf Weeds Commonly Confused

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The following table (Table 1) provides characteristics for recognizing 13 common turf that may be easily confused with one another. The weeds are divided into three categories. The first category is broad-leaved turf weeds with dissected weeds (pineapple weed, southern brassbuttons, lawn burweed, and less swinecress). The second is clover-like broad-leaved turf weeds (clovers, California burclover, black medic, and creeping wood sorrel). The third category is grass turf weeds, and these are divided into rhizomatous grasses (kikuyu grass, St. Augustine's grass, Bermuda grass) and tufted grasses (smooth/large crabgrass, Dallis grass). Characteristics were taken from the Jepson Manual of Higher Plants of California (Hickman ed., 1993) and Weeds of California and Other Western States (Ditomaso and Healy, 2007).

References:

Hickman, J. (editor). 1993. The Jepson Manual of Higher Plants of California. University of California Press, Berkeley, California.

Ditomaso, J. and E. Healy. 2007. Weeds of California and Other Western States. University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Oakland, California.

Table 1. Characteristics of commonly confused turf weeds in three categories: dissected broad leaves, clover-like broad leaves, rhizomatous grasses, and tufted grasses.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Distribution in CA	Growth Form	Leaves	Flowers	Fruits/Seeds
<i>Broad leaved forbes with dissected leaves</i>						
<i>Chamomilla suaveolens</i> Asteraceae	Pineapple weed	Throughout CA.	In turf, a low annual.	Leaves without obvious hairs. Leaf blade divided into pinnately arranged segments that are then divided into narrow, pinnate segments. No fragrance to the leaves.	Yellow-green, egg-shaped, stalked heads that smell of chamomille when crushed.	Many-sided, ribbed, dry fruits without any obvious appendages or spines.
<i>Cotula australis</i> Asteraceae	Southern brassbuttons	Mostly coastal turf/gardens.	Low annual.	Leaves with sparse, spreading hairs. Leaf blade divided into pinnately arranged segments that are either unlobed or pinnately lobed. Leaves sometimes fragrant when crushed.	Yellow, inconspicuous heads at the end of slender stalks.	Flattened, fruits without any appendages.
<i>Soliva sessilis</i> Asteraceae	Lawn burweed	Mostly coastal.	Low annual.	Leaves soft-hairy, the blade with pinnately-arranged segments that are then palmately dissected. No fragrance.	Very inconspicuous, unstalked, green heads hidden in the leaves.	Flattened, winged, dry fruits with spines at the top.
<i>Coronopus didymus</i> Brassicaceae	Lesser swinecress	Throughout CA.	Low annual.	Leaves hairless. First stem leaves arranged in a rosette. Leaf blades with pinnately arranged segments that are then divided again with more lobes on the side toward the leaf tip. The smell of the crushed leaves is like a pig barn.	Very inconspicuous, arranged along either side of an elongate axis. The fruits develop quickly and are the conspicuous part.	Small, balloon-like fruits.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Distribution in CA	Growth Form	Leaves	Flowers	Fruits/Seeds
<i>Broad leaved forbes with clover-like leaves</i>						
<i>Trifolium spp.</i> Fabaceae	Clover	Throughout CA.	Turf weed clovers tend to be rhizomatous perennials.	Leaf blade divided into three leaflets with finely serrated edges. Usually the leaflets of all three leaflets are the same length. The leafstalk is attached at the base of the leaf.	Flowers of various colors in small to large heads.	Fruit is a small legume pod with small seeds that are usually retained in the pod.
<i>Medicago polymorpha</i> Fabaceae	California burclover	Throughout CA.	Annual.	Leaf blade divided into three leaflets that are serrated near their tips. The small stalk connecting the terminal leaflet is longer than the other leaflet stalks. The leafstalk is attached at the base of the leaf.	Yellow flowers with typical pea-flower look. These in a few-flowered group.	Small seeds in a coiled pod. Pod is usually spiny.
<i>Medicago lupulina</i> Fabaceae	Black medic	Throughout CA.	Annual.	Leaf blade divided into three leaflets that are mostly unserrated at their edges. The small stalk connecting the terminal leaflet is longer than the other leaflet stalks. The leafstalk is attached at the base of the leaf.	Yellow flowers with typical pea-flower look. These are arranged in small heads.	One small seed in a small kidney-bean shaped pod that is black at maturity.
<i>Oxalis corniculata</i> Oxalidaceae	Creeping wood sorrel	Throughout CA.	Perennial from rhizomes that root at the nodes.	Leaf blade divided into three heart-shaped leaflets that are attached to a leafstalk at the center of leaf. Leaflets exhibit sleep movements (fold down at end of day). Leaflets do not have serrated edges.	Yellow flowers with 5 petals.	Small seeds with white appendage in cylindrical capsules.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Distribution in CA	Growth Form	Leaves	Flowers	Fruits/Seeds
<i>Grass turf weeds</i>						
<i>Pennisetum clandestinum</i> Poaceae	Kikuyu Grass	Southern California and coastal California. Not as common yet in the valley.	Perennial from thick stolons with swollen nodes, forming dense mats; internodes are relatively short and covered by brownish leaf sheaths.	Leaf blade often folded, short and pointed at the tip; leaves short hairy (especially on the sheath); top of sheath with long hairs; ligule hairy.	Inflorescence is hidden in leaf sheath and just styles or stamens show.	
<i>Stenotaphrum secundatum</i> Poaceae	St. Augustine's Grass	Used as a turf species in south and central coastal CA; rarely an escape.	Perennial from long, thick stolons, forming dense mats. The swollen nodes often have multiple branches emerging from one node; the internodes tend to be longer than in kikuyu grass and often uncovered.	Leaves usually folded, relatively short and wide with a blunt tip; ligule hairy.	Inflorescence a short, thick, finger-like axis.	
<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> Poaceae	Bermuda Grass	Throughout CA.	Perennial from long, very narrow rhizomes/stolons, forming loose mats.	Leaves not folded, narrower than in kikuyu grass, sparsely hairy; ligule hairy; top of sheath with very long hairs.	Inflorescence with several narrow branches coming from a single point (an umbel).	
<i>Digitaria ischaemum</i> and <i>sanguinalis</i> Poaceae	Smooth crabgrass/ large crabgrass	Throughout CA. Smooth crabgrass is the more common turf species.	Tufted annuals; in turf the stems lie close to the ground and form a circle.	Sheaths flattened, ligule a membrane 1-3 mm long, the leaf blade has a prominent midvein. In smooth crabgrass, the leaves and sheaths are mostly hairless. In large crabgrass, the leaves and sheaths are hairy.	Inflorescence with several very narrow and elongate branches that alternate up the inflorescence axis.	

<p><i>Paspalum dilatatum</i> Poaceae</p>	<p>Dallisgrass</p>	<p>Throughout CA.</p>	<p>Tufted perennial with short rhizomes; in turf, the stems lie close to the ground and form a circle.</p>	<p>Sheaths flattened, leaf blades without hairs, leaf sheath with some long hairs, ligule a membrane, 2-8 mm long.</p>	<p>Inflorescence with several elongate branches alternating up the main axis.</p>	
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