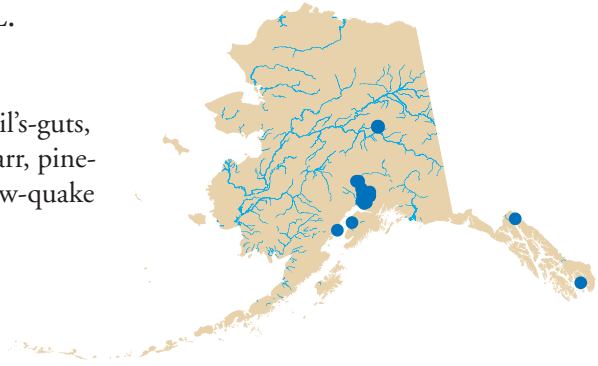
Corn Spurry

Spergula arvensis L.



Alternate Names

stickwort, starwort, devil's-guts, sandweed, pickpurse, yarr, pine-cheat, poverty-weed, cow-quake

Description

Corn spurry is an annual plant that is much branched at the base, with ½–2 foot long branches that are erect or spreading and yellowish-green in color. Thread-like leaves occur in whorls of 6 at the nodes with long upper internodes between them. Flowers are less than ¼ of an inch wide, white, and grouped in loose clusters at the ends of branches.

KULAK photo by Paul Busselen

Similar Species

Knawel (*Scleranthus annuus* L.) is often confused with corn spurry because of its growth habit. Present in British Columbia but not yet in Alaska, it is distinguished by awl-shaped leaves that appear in pairs at stem nodes. The seedling of Russian thistle (*Salsola kali* L.), the introduced tumbleweed of the American West, is often mistaken for the seedling of corn spurry. However, in Russian thistle, the leaves are spine-tipped.

Management

Hand-pulling can provide effective control for corn spurry if undertaken prior to seed production and repeated until the seedbank is exhausted, due to its annual habit. Application of a selective herbicide can also be effective.

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Notes

Corn spurry is considered an invasive species in New Zealand. It is a troublesome agricultural weed on Kodiak Island and the Kenai Peninsula and was recently found in Anchorage gardens. The seed can be dried and ground into a meal and then used with flour for making bread, but only as a famine food. The seeds contain saponins, which are mildly toxic unless cooked.

XID Services photo by Dan Tenaglia