

Beleagured by 'Bedstraw'

By Jolene Adams

One of the yuckiest weeds I know is 'common bedstraw'. It is starting to invade the Bay Area and many of you have probably seen it and wondered what the heck it is.



Also called 'catchweed' the plant is *Gallium aparine* – a low-growing, spreading weed that can crawl along for 80 feet or more. It is easy to pull out as the taproot is

slender and not very long, but when you touch it ... it sticks to you!

That is the 'catch' part. The square stems have short, downward pointing bristles that make the plant feel 'sticky.' The stems and leaves catch on you, the dog, even the undercarriage of your car – and a segment of the plant is transported to another section of the garden where any seeds it is carrying can drop to the ground and germinate.



The plant has an interesting appearance – the leaves grow in whorls of 6 to 8 leaves at nodes on the stem. The leaves are also hairy and feel 'sticky.' The tiny yellowish white flowers yield up seed pods that are covered with hooked hairs that make them stick to everything that touches them.

This plant is usually baled up along with hay or straw, and the seeds get transported to new pastures or to urban gardens. In former eras, it was used to stuff a mattress or pillow – thus the 'bedstraw' name.

Now, oddly enough, this plant is also called 'white bedstraw' or 'cleavers' and is often found in old herbals and natural medicine periodicals as a palliative for sore throat and strep throat. It is also prescribed as a diuretic and purgative.

The health food industry is starting to look at this plant as a possible money maker. They can come and pull it out of my garden any time – I don't want any of it!

