

Vascular Plants of Williamson County
***Stellaria pallida* – LESSER CHICKWEED [Caryophyllaceae]**

Stellaria pallida (Dumort.) Crépin, LESSER CHICKWEED. Annual, slender-taprooted, several-stemmed at base, prostrate or decumbent to ascending (erect), sometimes with adventitious roots and branching at nodes of prostrate stems, unbranched below inflorescence of ascending to erect stems, in range typically to ca. 20 cm tall; shoots with only cauline leaves, tender and wilting easily. **Stems:** cylindric, 0.8–2 mm diameter, weak, slightly wider at nodes, internodes to 70 mm long, short-hairy along an axial line descending from 1 notch between leaf bases, the hairs soft, translucent, curved to wavy or ± kinky, mostly pointing downward; internodes hollow. **Leaves:** opposite decussate, simple, petiolate and pair connected by 2 low ledges across node but grading into sessile bracts just below inflorescence, without stipules; petiole < 12 mm long, ± V-shaped in ×-section and mostly < 1 mm wide but sometimes on lower leaves to 3 mm wide and leaflike, sparsely short-ciliate on 1 or both margins; blade ± ovate to broadly elliptic, to 19 × 1.5–12 mm, flat, thin, rounded to tapered or narrowly tapered at base, entire, acute with short point at tip, faintly pinnately veined with midrib raised on lower surface but lateral veins sometimes obscure, dull, glabrous. **Inflorescence:** leafy dichasial cyme, terminal, initially densely clustered from close nodes later more open by elongation of pedicels, many-flowered, bracteate; bracts subtending peduncle 2 and opposite, leaflike but sessile and fused across node, ovate, to 15 mm long; peduncle stemlike also with an axial line of soft hairs; bractlet subtending pedicel absent; pedicel spreading to erect, at anthesis < 1 mm long increasing to 12 mm long in fruit, short-ciliate along an axial line (stemlike), often recurved in developing fruit but becoming ascending to erect before fruit dehiscence; bracteoles absent. **Flower:** bisexual, radial, ca. 1.2 mm across; in range cleistogamous; **sepals** 5, overlapping, together appearing lanceoloid like a bud, subequal, narrowly ovate, at pollination 2.8–3.2 × 0.75–1 mm, increasing slightly in fruit, green, narrowly membranous on margins, the larger outer sepals erect-pubescent where exposed in bud, the inner sepals somewhat keeled with wider membranous margins on unexposed margins and with a row of hairs along keel; **petals** absent; **stamens** (1–)2–3, free; filaments erect, 1–1.5 mm long, translucent-white, expanded and greenish at base (**nectaries**); anthers dithecal, ± 0.15 mm long, purplish red to purple, longitudinally dehiscent; pollen translucent pale amber; **pistil** 1, not stalked; ovary superior, ovoid, at pollination ± 0.5 mm long, green, 1-chambered with 10–15 on an erect, basal placenta; styles 3, positioned at same level as anthers, recurved, ca. 0.3 mm long, whitish translucent, papillate-stigmatic along most of upper face. **Fruit:** capsule, dehiscent from tip by 3 valves splitting lengthwise into 6 erect segments, to 14-seeded, ovoid, 3.3–5 × 1.7–2 mm, slightly > sepals, valves resembling lanceolate sepals, straw-colored and somewhat scariosus. **Seed:** ± thick disc-shaped, in range 0.8–1.1 mm diameter, 0.4–0.55 mm thick, cinnamon to yellowish ochre, low-warty on lateral faces, papillate in 3 rows along edge, slightly notched at hilum.

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