

Mouse-eared Chickweed (*Cerastium vulgatum*)

This agricultural weed is originally from Eurasia. It is found across most of the United States on abandoned cultivated lands and, in our case, a prairie restoration in a once-cultivated field. It won't tolerate plowing, but the seed must remain viable for several years.

The meaning of the species name is "common or generally accessible;" I prefer to take it more literally and call it "vulgar" as in offensive or indecent! The name "chickweed" comes from plants used as starter feed for chicks.

This particular chickweed gets its common name from the cute little fuzzy leaves that resemble mouse ears. But when it's on your land, there isn't anything cute about it. It spreads by seeds and rootlets which are set down from the spreading arms of this mat-forming plant. *C. vulgatum* blooms from spring to fall as long as it's cool and moist. This sun-loving plant will form a green mat in very little time and will shade out germinating prairie plant seeds. I have not been in the right place at the right time to know when one first comes up to time how many days before it covers a certain area. We've had a fairly warm, early spring this year (2016) with maybe 15 days of greening up. With that said, the picture below shows how quickly this chickweed can spread.



The plant before it begins putting out "arms" and crawling along the ground.



It's easy to see how this can blanket the ground. Because this plant grows by hugging the ground and spreading out, the best control is by herbicides. Mowing close cuts the first blooms off but further mowing encourages its low creeping habit. A 2% mixture of glyphosate is sufficient to kill the plant. It's important to do this when it first pops up from the ground. Its blanketing effect is sufficiently quick that herbiciding it at this stage creates "deserts" – areas of barren ground. When this happens, you can overseed or plant seedlings in the area.