
SUNNYSIDE THYMES

Volume 27, Issue 11

“Helping Others Grow”

November 2018

Wicked Weeds

By Carrie Hunter, SMG member

Purslane: The Wicked, Zombie Weed

The zombies took over your garden. Getting rid of them was a nightmare. Every time you tried, an arm came off and a new zombie grew from it. Oh, wait . . . that was purslane *Portulaca oleracea*.

Purslane is native to India and Persia and now grows most everywhere in the world: untilled ground, newly disturbed ground, sandy soil, poor soil, rich soil, etc. Purslane can be considered a highly prized edible plant or a weed. (Weed: wild plant growing where it is not wanted and in competition with wanted plants.) Common purslane is closely related to moss rose, *Portulaca grandiflora*.

Growing in a circular or rosette form, purslane is easily identifiable. Its fleshy leaves and stems identify it as a succulent. Leaves and stems are often a soft, lime green and may be maroon tinged at the edges when the plant is mature. Purslane has a main taproot with minor side roots. Small yellow flowers are star shaped and form at leaf nodes, close to the stem, thus making it difficult to see the seed pods once they've formed. Purslane is an annual plant and reproduces by seed or by the rooting of stems and pieces.

So, purslane, the zombie weed . . . removing purslane from your garden is a do-able job, however, preventing purslane from returning is another matter. Purslane is best removed by hand pulling. It is best to pull starts from 1-2 weeks as the plant may have mature seeds later which can be dislodged with pulling. Be sure to remove all of the plant - roots, too, as any part of the plant left touching the soil can take root. Seeds may stay viable for up to 4 years and even composting is often not hot enough to destroy them. Be sure to dispose of

purslane in the garbage. Herbicides may be effective if used before flowering and seed setting.



Purslane seeds *Photos: Univ. of Wisconsin Extension - 8/22/11 Susan Mahr* don't germinate well if they are deeper in the soil than four inches. That's right, *four inches!* Tilling can bring purslane seeds up nearer the surface of the soil. So, mulching after removal may prevent return of the plant.

Now, purslane, the prized edible plant: purslane is highly nutritious because it is unusually high in omega-3 fatty acids (found mostly in fish and flax seeds) and contains significant amounts of vitamins A and C, as well as calcium, iron, magnesium and potassium and antioxidants. It also contains high amounts of oxalates (just as spinach does) so avoid eating purslane if you are susceptible to forming kidney stones.

Young leaves, stems, and flowers have a lemony, sour, peppery flavor. Purslane can be eaten raw in salads, salsas, and sprinkled on pizza for added crunch. Cook purslane by steaming, sautéing, or adding it to soups, stews, and veggie medleys. Cooked purslane becomes mucilaginous (think okra) and can be used to thicken soups and stews.



Embrace the purslane zombie! Form a purslane zombie posse! What's *your* plan for purslane?

Sources:

- www.britannica.com
- www.web.extension.illinois.edu
- www.wimastergardener.org
- <https://cnz.to/ingredients-fine-foods/45-things-to-do-with-purslane/> (recipes)
- www.indiatimes.com

