

Q: I have carpets of Bermuda buttercup that come up every spring. I have sprayed and weeded for years, but they just seem to spread. Is there anything I can do to get rid of these plants?

A: Bermuda buttercup, Sour-grass or Soursop (*Oxalis pes-caprae*) is a very tenacious plant in temperate climates. This small perennial herb, native to South Africa can spread aggressively, particularly if you live close to the Bay or coast, where the climate is most moderate. The clover-like trifoliolate foliage emerge from short stems attached to light brown bulbs underground. Each one of those bulbs can produce over 20 small, white bulblets each year, which means that when you try to pull the plants, you are frequently propagating the bulblets throughout the soil. The flowers are a bright daffodil yellow. The one bright spot is that it does not appear to set viable seed. With all those bulblets, seed is not necessary for this plants survival. Photos are available at <http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=OXPE> .

The name Sour grass or Soursop refers to the sour tasting oxalic acid produced by the plant. Oxalic acid has caused livestock poisoning in situations where this plant has invaded pastures in large numbers. *Oxalis pes-caprae* had been a garden weed for a long time, but recently has been found invading coastal dune environments as well, where it can form dense mats that out compete other plants. *O. pes-caprae* is a major weed in much of Australia and throughout the Mediterranean, spreading most aggressively in fertile, well-drained soils, with full sun. The bulblets can be moved by equipment and transplants and by water if areas flood.

The best approach is prevention, so for those who do not have this weed established, watch for it and pull emerging seedlings repeatedly. If your garden has full hot sun in the summer months, solarization for the entire season will kill the bulbs in the top 4-6" of the soil. Sheet mulching with cardboard and thick layers of mulch will weaken the bulbs over time, but you may need to wait several seasons before you could plant. If you use herbicides, timing is critical, and you have to repeat applications regularly. People have been known to sift yards of garden soil attempting to remove the bulblets, with very limited success. The plant is only a weed in the winter and spring, as it goes summer dormant. The flowers are certainly as attractive as daffodils, and learning to appreciate them may be the best choice.