

Q: How can I get rid of the sour-grass in my yard? I have pulled it every year and it just comes back.

A: Have you tried biting the stems of Sourgrass, also called Cape sorrel, Bermuda buttercup, soursob, and oxalis? One nibble will let you know why the common name is appropriate, due to the high levels of oxalic acid found in the plant. *Oxalis pes-caprae* is the correct name for this little plant, which has brilliant yellow flowers in the spring held above the trifoliate (clover-like) leaves. The genus name *Oxalis* comes from the Greek word for sour, and the species epithet *pes-caprae* means goat-foot. It originated in the Cape region of South Africa, where it is considered endangered. It is certainly not endangered in California, as anyone who has it in his or her garden knows all too well.

Oxalis was introduced to California gardens as an ornamental spring blooming bulb sometime in the early 1900's. It seems difficult to believe, but the plant does not set viable seed here. All of the spreading occurs via bulb offsets- up to 20 little bulbs that form around the 'parent' bulb and runners that spread out laterally around the plant. The runners are plumb and white, and help the plant colonize entire areas. Eradication is difficult and time consuming, but if you are interested in growing other plants in your garden, you will need to remove this aggressive, if pretty, invader.

If you have a small patch, aggressive hand weeding over a period of four to five years every spring can give you control. Some gardeners will 'sieve' the soil to remove as many of the bulbs as possible, but the practicality of this depends on the type of soil that you have. If you can mow the top growth in the late winter before bloom, you can weaken the bulbs. If you have a large area, you may need to use herbicides, but be aware that you may kill desired plants.

Caution: Do not till areas infested with oxalis. It is an excellent way to spread and propagate this weed!