

The Weekly Plant

15 April 2012

Common names: white tackstem, white cupfruit

Scientific name: *Calycoseris wrightii*¹

TAV location:

Very scattered. Check along the roadside as you walk around the Village. There are several between lots 28 and 33.

Discussion:

White tackstem is a small, annual plant, no more than 12" high, with large white flower heads, sometimes with yellow centers. The flower stalk and the base of the flower head are covered with small tack-shaped glands², hence the common name. Leaves are found mainly at the base of the plant. The seed head will remind you of a dandelion.

This is the first Weekly Plant in the Asteraceae (aster, daisy, or sunflower family). Because each flower head is composed of many tiny flowers, these plants are known as composites. This family has more members than any other family in North American north of Mexico. Many are similar in appearance and distinguishing features may only be apparent under magnification. Both experts and amateurs can become extremely frustrated when trying to ID these plants.

Fortunately, white tackstem is in a small subgroup of the aster family - the chicory tribe. This tribe has some unique characteristics that aid in identification: large petals with 5 teeth or lobes; usually white, milky sap; and a dandelion-like seed head. Lettuce, chicory, sow thistle, hawksbeard, goatsbeard (salsify), and dandelion are also in this tribe.

All composites have flowers with 5 petals. In the chicory tribe, the petals are fused and held to one side of the flower³. You can see the 5 lobes of the fused petals in the first photo.

In all composites, sepals and petals are at the top of the ovary. The sepals may be bristly or scaly. In the chicory tribe, the sepals are bristly. These bristles become the "fluff" in the seed head (think dandelion).

Another plant native to southeast Arizona is quite similar. Desert chicory (*Rafinesquia neomexicana*) also has white flowers but no glands. It blooms a bit earlier than tackstem.

¹ *The Jepson Manual, Vascular Plants of California* is the source of the currently accepted scientific name.

² No reference I consulted gave a function for the glands. I do know that if you hold the stalk gently between your fingers, your fingers become sticky.

³ This is called a ligulate flower. The fused petals are called ligules.



Flower head cut open to show individual flowers. Note tack-shaped glands.



Above: a single flower, petal and bristly sepal to left, yellow ovary to right. Below left: seed head. Below right: seed (ovary) and bristly sepals.

