

Texas Bindweed

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You might be wondering, can a bindweed be a desirable plant? If you have bindweed in a cropland field you would answer this question with a definite no. But with this bindweed the answer would be a definite yes. Texas bindweed is a native, perennial warm-season forb that grows with prostrate to twining vines that climb over low foliage or along the ground. This plant is widely adapted to growing in Texas and is found in all vegetative regions with the exception of the Piney Woods of East Texas. Stems may be single or up to a few, up to six feet in length, densely hairy with matted white hairs, grayish in color, and lacking tendrils. The lack of tendrils means as it grows it may twin upon other plants but does not have tendrils to pull it up onto other plants. The scientific name is *Convolvulus equitans*, and both this native and the other introduced bindweed are in the Morning Glory family.

Leaves are variable in shape but usually always longer and thinner than the introduced and despised field bindweed, also called possession vine that is an aggressive invader in every state of the union. Traits of leaves of Texas bindweed include having alternate growth up the stem, stalked to the stem meaning the leaf attaches directly to the stem, being grey and hairy, often with spreading and irregular lobes on either side of the leaf base, and up to 3 inches in length and 1 ¾ inches in width. The upper parts of the leaves are usually smooth and wavy on the margins but are occasionally irregularly-toothed. When showing it to people, I have often described the leaf as looking like the most fantastic looking arrowhead you would ever hope to find.

Flowers emerge on a short stalk from the leaf axils, or where the leaf intersects with the stem. These flowers are ½ to 1 inch across, white to pink in color, often but not always with a red center, corolla is funnel-shaped with five angled petals with each angle extending into a point. Fruit is a capsule containing two to four black seeds, four if pollination of the ovary was complete.

The leaves and stem tips of Texas bindweed are readily eaten by deer and goats and is considered good forage. The large seeds are eaten by quail, dove, turkey and songbirds. Since this plant is found over such a large area of Texas it becomes a valuable component to the vegetational composition of the pastures. The presence of Texas bindweed in a pasture can be used as an indicator of good range management where livestock numbers and deer numbers are within the carrying capacity of the land. The presence of these and other desirable plants enable those who can “read the land” to predict how strong the pasture will be for livestock and wildlife.

Texas bindweed is a desirable native and should not be confused with the introduced and despised field bindweed, *Convolvulus arvensis*. Texas bindweed does not form dense colonies like field bindweed nor does it spread by rhizomes as will field bindweed. Texas bindweed will be seen as individual plants and can be several yards between plants, depending upon current and past grazing pressure. In May of this year I was assisting in the training of younger NRCS employees outside of Hamilton. In a pasture there I saw Texas bindweed everywhere, perhaps a plant every one to two yards apart. This was the densest concentration of Texas Bindweed I have seen in a long time, in a pasture that has livestock and white-tailed deer and is well managed. To find this plant you must learn to look down near the soil surface, looking through the grasses to see the twining vines. It is easier to spot while in flower but it can be found when the seed pods are maturing if you look closely enough. While it can be found in nearly all habitats it is most common on sandy, loamy and rocky soils. The seeds are beginning to ripen now so be on the lookout and gather some seeds to scatter upon your land.

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Photo captions:

1 The flowers of Texas bindweed are often seen less than an inch across but are easily seen down in the grass.



2 The twining stems of Texas bindweed lack tendrils to pull it upon other plants but twines through the ground cover as it grows.



3 This stem was just over six feet in length and tall enough to lay upon this post for the photo.



4 Stems twine upon each other as they lay upon the ground, here held up against the sky for a clear photo



5 Funnel-shaped flowers of Texas bindweed are angled with each of the five petals ending in a sharp tip



6 If the flower was fully pollinated the rounded seed pod will contain four black seeds.

