

## ***Oxalis pes-caprae***

**Common names:** Soursop, sourgrass, sorrel, buttercup oxalis, yellow flowered oxalis

**Family:** Oxalidaceae

### **Not-so-fun Facts:**

- ★ Widespread throughout all states of Australia and a declared weed in Victoria
- ★ It outcompetes cereal crops and can reduce yields significantly
- ★ Grows well along roadsides, in gardens and bushland where it inhibits germination and growth of native species
- ★ High in oxalic acid. Toxic to grazing stock and mildly toxic to humans if eaten in large quantities



Severe infestation of *Oxalis pes-caprae*.

Image source: Private collection. Photos by M. Thomson

### **Identifiable characteristics:**

- ★ Fast growing, small (up to 40cm), herbaceous, upright perennial herb
- ★ Leaves are dull to bright green with 3 heart shaped leaflets – similar to clover leaves
- ★ Leaves often have purple/brown flecks on the upper surface
- ★ Flowers are odourless, bright yellow and trumpet shaped with 5 petals
- ★ Flowers appear from May through to November
- ★ Flowers open in sunlight and follow the sun

### Life cycle:

- ★ Large infestations may contain up to 3000 plants per square meter - that's A LOT!
- ★ Underground bulbs produce up to 20 small bulbils which can each produce a new plant
- ★ Bulbils are dispersed by water, soil and animals
- ★ Swollen roots produce bulb like tubers
- ★ Seed capsules rarely develop in Australian conditions

### Non chemical control methods:

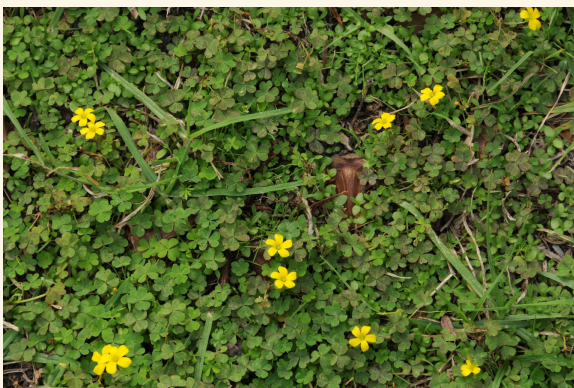
- ★ For small infestations, physical removal is achievable. It is best done at the first signs of flowering (when the bulbs are exhausted) and being mindful not to disturb the underground bulbils
- ★ Repeated cutting or pulling of tops will deplete bulbs over several years.
- ★ If whipper snipping large infestations, breathing masks are recommended due to the high oxalic acid concentration
- ★ Follow up removal or covering with thick layers of cardboard and heavy (at least 10cm thick) natural mulch

### Chemical control methods:

- ★ Best done just before flowering (when bulbs are exhausted)
- ★ For large infestations herbicides may need to be reapplied over several seasons to exhaust the bulbs

### Fun Facts:

- ★ There are many native *Oxalis* varieties to watch out for when weeding your garden
- ★ Native varieties only reproduce by seed, they are not invasive and generally have smaller flowers
- ★ *Oxalis pes-caprae* is edible in small quantities. A quick Google search will give you lots of ideas - from soup, to salad and chutney!



Native *Oxalis exilis*. Image source: VICFLORA  
Photo by I. Clarke



Native *Oxalis perennans*. Image source: VICFLORA  
Photo by G & M Goods

## References & super helpful resources:

Agriculture Victoria

[https://vro.agriculture.vic.gov.au/dpi/vro/vrosite.nsf/pages/weeds\\_herbs\\_perennial\\_sourso](https://vro.agriculture.vic.gov.au/dpi/vro/vrosite.nsf/pages/weeds_herbs_perennial_sourso)

Google: "Oxalis recipes" search results

[https://www.google.com/search?q=oxalis+recipes&rlz=1C1AWFC\\_enAU796AU796&oq=oxalis+recipes&aqs=chrome..69i57j0i22i30i2j0i390i650i4.3703j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=oxalis+recipes&rlz=1C1AWFC_enAU796AU796&oq=oxalis+recipes&aqs=chrome..69i57j0i22i30i2j0i390i650i4.3703j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)

Marshall, T. (2010). *Weed: the ultimate gardener's guide to organic weed control*. HarperCollinsPublishersAustralia Pty Ltd.

Nillumbik Shire Council

<https://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au/Explore/Environment/Natural-environment/Plants-and-trees/Weeds>

North Central Catchment Management Authority (2012). *Weeds identification guide*.

[https://www.nccma.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/weeds\\_identification\\_guide.pdf](https://www.nccma.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/weeds_identification_guide.pdf)

VICFLORA Flora of Victoria

<https://vicflora.rbq.vic.gov.au/flora/search?q=%2aoxalis%2a>

Yarra Ranges Council

<https://www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/Environment/Trees-and-vegetation/Weeds>

