

Lepidium L. PEPPERGRASS

Lepidium nitidum Nutt., SHINY PEPPERGRASS. Annual, short-lived, taprooted, without basal rosette, 1–several-stemmed at base, sometimes branched above, erect, 7–40 cm tall; shoots green becoming reddish on exposed surfaces, puberulent with unbranched hairs (glabrous), the hairs straight and spreading. **Stems:** cylindric, to 1.5 mm diameter at base. **Leaves:** helically alternate (sometimes opposite at base), pinnately dissected with 3–4 lobes per edge (lower leaves) and unlobed (upper cauline leaves), sessile, without stipules; blade linear or lanceolate to oblanceolate in outline, 6–50 × 0.6–12 mm, of dissected leaves with rachis 1–1.7 mm wide and ascending lobes, the lobes linear, 3–10 × 0.5–1.2 mm, entire on lobes and blade margins, often with short point at tip, pinnately veined with only midrib raised on lower surface, puberulent to glabrescent. **Inflorescence:** raceme, terminal, many-flowered, with open flowers overtopping buds but not the developing fruits, puberulent; peduncle to 12 mm long; bractlets subtending pedicels absent; pedicel at anthesis 1–2 mm long increasing to 3 × in fruit. **Flower:** bisexual, radial, 1–1.8 mm across; **sepals** 4, elliptic, 0.7–1 × 0.4–0.5 mm, mostly green but white marginally becoming rose red to dark red, pubescent or glabrous, deciduous; **petals** 4, spatulate to oblanceolate, 0.9–1.4 × 0.4–0.6 mm, white; **stamens** 2, 3, or 4, included or barely exerted, 0.8–1.4 mm long; filaments white; anthers dithecal, 0.1–0.2 mm long, yellowish, longitudinally dehiscent; pollen light yellow; **nectaries** 4–6, minute scalelike to ± fingerlike protuberances from receptacle, 2 or 3 on each side of ovary separated by ovary septum, translucent green becoming whitish; **pistil** 1; ovary superior, circular in outline and flattened, ca. 0.8 mm long, minutely notched at tip, compressed ⊥ to septum, 2-chambered, each chamber with 1 ovule; style absent or very short; stigma discoid, whitish to pale yellow, densely papillate, the papillae short, colorless or translucent-white. **Fruit:** siliqua (silicle), dehiscent by 2 valves, 2-seeded, circular to broadly elliptic with slightly inflated chambers, 3.5–5.4 × 3.3–4.5 mm, often purple, glabrous (glabrescent), somewhat glossy, ± flat to slightly concave on 1 side and slightly convex on the other side, with a conspicuous midline (septum), V-notched 0.1–0.4 mm deep at tip, slightly winged on margins from notch downward, with seeds attached at the top to an elliptic, translucent septum; not beaked; pedicel in fruit ascending to spreading and strongly flattened (lateral width ca. 2× vertical width), puberulent. **Seed:** compressed-ovoid with folded embryo evident, 1.7–2.3 × 1–1.3 mm, dull pale greenish yellow to light orange or cinnamon brown; very gelatinous when wetted. Mid-December–late March.

Native. Annual of early spring found occasionally in sunny locations. *Lepidium nitidum* is one of the earliest herbs to bloom and dries up quickly, or it does not appear in drought years. This species of peppergrass tends to be a slender, often unbranched plant. It has tiny, white flowers; its fruits are characteristic for the genus, but the pedicels are strongly flattened as compared with related species. If recognized, our populations would be *L. nitidum* var. *nitidum*.

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