

Linum L. FLAX

Linum micranthum A. Gray, SMALL-FLOWERED DWARF FLAX. Annual, wispy, slender-taprooted, 1–several-stemmed at base = an ascending to spreading inflorescence, erect, 9–28 cm long; shoots with flexible and wiry stems and small, slender leaves. **Stems:** cylindrical, to 1.5 mm diameter, puberulent and sometimes sparsely glandular with minute sessile hairs. **Leaves:** opposite to appearing 4-whorled at shoot base, alternate above, simple, subsessile (petiole not clearly distinct from blade), with stipules only at the lowermost nodes; stipules typically 2, attached to stem, conic, ca. 0.1 mm, glandular, becoming reddish; blade linear, 5–20 × < 1 mm, flat, tapered at base, entire, acute at tip, 1-veined from base, dull, in range glabrescent to puberulent. **Inflorescence:** monochasial cyme, terminal, open, many-flowered, bracteate, inconspicuously short-hairy; peduncle = upper portion of stem, 5–11 mm long; branches 5–35 mm long, glabrous or puberulent at the base, axes slender; bractlet subtending pedicel leaflike, sessile; pedicel 1.5–20 × 0.2 mm, wiry, often reddish, glabrous to glabrate. **Flower:** bisexual, ± radial, 2–3 mm across; **sepals** 5, overlapping and strongly attached to receptacle, tightly appressed to corolla, unequal, ovate, 0.9–1.7 × 0.6–0.8 mm, inner sepals wider than outer sepals, slightly cupped, glandular short-ciliate, inconspicuously 3-veined with midvein raised on outer surface; **petals** (petaloid staminodes) 5, free, attached to rim of staminal cup, narrowly obovate to oblanceolate, in range 1.9–3.5 × 0.7–1.2 mm, white often blushed pink or rose on exposed surfaces, laterally toothed or lobed at base typically with (0)1 tooth or lobe per edge (rarely 2 on 1 edge), acute to rounded or slightly indented at tip, typically appendaged on outer surface; appendages short, ± fingerlike over midvein and united with “petal” for most of length, purplish red at tip, with white hirsute hairs; lobes linear to lanceolate or oblanceolate, 0.7 mm long and acute or 2-forked; **stamens** 5, fused at bases into short tube, ascending; tube cuplike, ± 0.2 mm long, ± 0.7 mm diameter, white-translucent, thickened where petals attached and bluntly toothed on each margin of petal; filaments 0.6–1 mm long, white, sparsely puberulent at base and adjacent portion of tube; anthers exerted, dorsifixed, dithecal, lanceoloid, 0.4–0.6 mm long, pale yellow, longitudinally dehiscent; pollen glistening light yellow; **pistil** 1; ovary superior, spheroid, 0.6–0.7 mm, yellowish green, glabrous, (4–)6-chambered, each chamber with 2 ovules; styles (2–)3, sometimes shortly fused at base, ascending or arching, linear, 0.4–0.7 mm long, whitish or aging reddish; stigmatic tip slightly expanded and pale green or aging reddish. **Fruit:** capsule, septicidal and loculicidal, (4–)6-seeded, broadly ovoid, in range 1.5–1.7 × 1.6–1.9 mm, obtusely pointed at tip, glossy, sometimes with persistent style bases, short-ciliate on septa. **Seed:** hemi-ovoid and wedge-shaped in x-section, 1.4–1.6 × 0.5–0.7 mm, glossy tan to brown and mottled with black spots; becoming mucilaginous when wetted. Late April–early July.

Native. Annual infrequently encountered growing in very shallow soils in open patches between shrubs of chamise chaparral, mostly in the western part of SMM. Amazingly, the wispy *Linum micranthum*, also called *Hesperolinon micranthum*, can appear in the driest of years, as in 2007, and begins to flower after most spring annuals are finished, during dry, hot early summer; the fruits mostly dehisce during mid-summer. In range, flowers are tiny, and axes are so slender that the plants can be easily overlooked. The small size of our

flowers may be why our fruits and seeds are smaller than is typical for the species. Fruit set is high because these flowers appear to be self-pollinated, and pollination likely occurs even before the flowers open. Petals in this genus have been interpreted in various treatments to be petaloid staminodes, i.e., modified stamens, meaning that, technically speaking, petals are absent.

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