

Stellaria L. CHICKWEED, STARWORT

Stellaria nitens Nutt., SHINING STARWORT, SHINING CHICKWEED. Annual, wispy, slender-taprooted, 1–several-stemmed at base, typically with a main axis and repeatedly forked only in inflorescence, ascending to erect, 3–25 cm tall; shoots sparsely hairy below and glabrous above, the hairs soft, unbranched, and translucent. **Stems:** somewhat flattened and squarish to hexagonal in \times -section, < 0.4 mm diameter, tough but not wiry, sparsely to moderately hairy below the uppermost leaf pair, the hairs wavy or kinky and \pm evenly distributed, not hairy along a descending axial line; internode with a squarish hollow center. **Leaves:** opposite decussate, simple, sessile (sometimes appearing petiolate) with pair connected by 2 low ledges across node, without stipules; blade long-spatulate to oblanceolate or obovate (at basal nodes) to linear-lanceolate, 5–14 \times 0.5–3 mm, flat, thin, long-tapered (at basal nodes) to rounded at base, entire or sparsely ciliate on margins, acute to acuminate at tip, pinnately veined but lateral veins obscure, shiny when fresh but lower surface becoming dull. **Inflorescence:** dichasial cyme, terminal, typically 3–13-flowered including to 3-flowered per lateral branch, bracteate, glabrous; bracts subtending peduncle paired, leaflike; peduncle erect, 20–40 mm long, much shorter (3.5–10 mm long) on inflorescences terminating a lateral branch; lateral branches ascending, axes slender; bracts paired at nodes (1 per lateral branch), narrowly ovate to lanceolate, 1.5–3.5 \times 0.5–0.8 mm, with membranous margins, acute to acuminate and membranous at tip, greenish along midrib (sometimes narrowly so) becoming purplish tinged beginning along inner part of membranous margin; bractlets subtending pedicel paired; pedicel ascending to erect, 1–20(–27) mm long. **Flower:** bisexual, radial, 2–3 mm across; receptacle green, funnel-shaped, slightly fleshy on inner face; **sepals** 5, narrowly lanceolate with long-acuminate tip, 2.8–4 \times 0.6–0.8 mm increasing slightly in fruit, green, narrowly membranous on margins, glabrous, 3-veined with principal veins raised on lower surface; **petals** 5 deeply Y-shaped, 0.5–1.3 mm long, white, the base 0.15–0.3 mm long, the lobes narrowly oblanceolate to narrowly lanceolate, equal or unequal in length or width; **stamens** typically 3(4–5), free; filaments 0.7 mm long, white, expanded at yellowish base; anthers dorsifixed, dithecal, 0.1–0.25 mm long, yellowish, longitudinally dehiscent; pollen yellowish; **nectaries** at bases of stamens opposite sepals, minute; **pistil** 1, on a short stalk (carphophore) < 0.25 mm long; ovary superior, ovoid, 0.7–1 \times 0.6–0.7 mm, green, 1-chambered with 18–22 ovules on an erect, basal placenta; styles 3, 0.3 mm long, recurved, papillate, stigmatic entire length of upper (inner) face, whitish to light yellowish on stigmatic portion, green at base. **Fruit:** capsule, dehiscent from tip by 3 valves splitting lengthwise into 6 erect segments, 15–22-seeded, narrowly ovoid, 3–3.4 mm long, < sepal length, straw-colored, segments outwardly curved at tip; stalk inconspicuous. **Seed:** roundish to ovate, 0.5–0.7 mm long, dull orange-yellow to orangish brown, with fine bumps on margins and more rough on faces. Mid-February–mid-April.

Native. An inconspicuous, early-spring annual occasionally found on grassy or herb-dominated slopes with thin soils. *Stellaria nitens* can be easily overlooked, and is seldom collected because the plant is very delicate in comparison with the associated herbs. Stems of this native are tough, so that pulling on the inflorescence easily removes the plant from the soil. Leaves are produced in pairs fused across the node; the lowermost leaves are

spatulate and therefore somewhat resemble a petiolate leaf. Petals are short relative to sepal length and are easily lost as flowers age or are handled, so in range flowers may appear to lack petals; for the distribution of *Stellaria nitens*, authors have reported flowers without petals. Nectar is present as a reward for pollinators.

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