

Weeds in My Garden (Part 4)

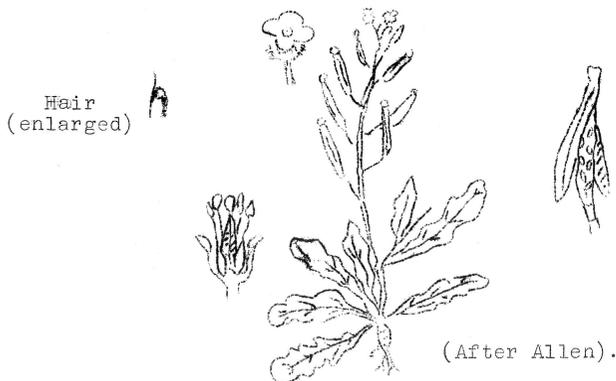
Diplotaxis muralis (L) D.C. Wall Rocket or Wall Mustard.

The Wall Rocket belongs to a family well represented in New Zealand by plants both wanted (stocks and gilliflowers and useful vegetables such as turnips, cabbage etc.) and unwanted (such as wild cabbage, turnip, radish etc.) Crucifers (family Cruciferae) are readily recognised by their characteristic little cross-shaped flowers (hence the name from the Lat. crux, cricis - a cross) and their dry usually splitting fruits.

The stems of the Wall Rocket spring from a little rosette of leaves somewhat after the style of a dandelion. They reach twenty inches high and are leafy only below. The small yellow flowers form a cluster at the ends of the stems. But as the seeds mature the loose racemes elongates bearing characteristic cruciferous fruits. In this case it is a long capsule surmounted by a little beak or nob. The two valves eventually split showing numerous seeds in two distinct rows.

A "spotting point" in the bulbous based downwardly directed hairs, is found sparingly on the stalk.

In England this Rocket was sometimes known by the approbrious name of Stinkweed, as the leaves have an unpleasant smell when crushed. But why crush them? Wall Rocket or Wall Mustard as it is sometimes called are quite good names.

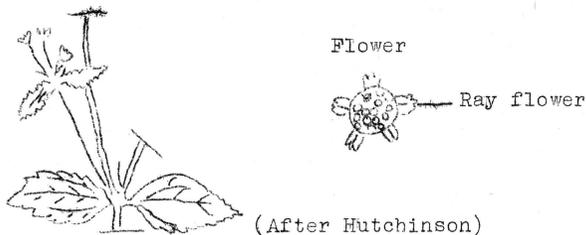


Galinsoga parviflora Cav. Kew Weed, Yellow Weed.

A curious little weed is flourishing in my garden just now, to wit, the Kew Weed. It is a tap-rooted branched annual up to about 16 inches tall, with stems angled lower down and round above, and opposite leaves. It is a true member of the daisy family (Compositae), but the little flower, only about a quarter of an inch across is unusual for the way the little ray flowers surround the central disc. Instead of there being a

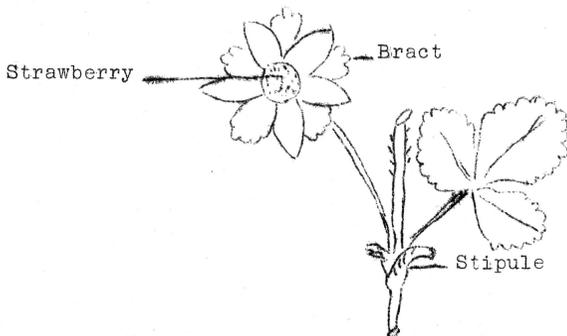
large number of strap-shaped white rays as in the common lawn daisy, there are only five rays broad with three lobes and set widely apart as they surround the central yellow disc of tiny tubular flowers.

Galinsoga hails originally from Peru whence it was introduced to Kew in 1796. Liking its adopted country it became well naturalised in the vicinity where its name suggested the local term Gallant Soldiers. More sedately it was known as the Kew Weed, a name it still bears in England.



Duchesnea indica (Andrew) Focke, Indian Strawberry.

In my garden just now is a little strawberry-like plant bearing bright red deceptively luscious looking little strawberries. It immediately suggests the English Wild Strawberry (Fragaria vesca) which is also common in New Zealand. But in fact it is the Indian Strawberry (*indica* means Indian) and is readily distinguished from the true wild Strawberry by its yellow instead of white flowers, and its tasteless little fruits. It is noticeable that both these little strawberry plants have leafy bracts between the sepals (forming what botanists call an epicalyx) but those of the Indian Strawberry are broad and three lobed while those of the Wild Strawberry are narrow and pointed.



Amarantus hybridus L., Pilewort

Very persistent weeds that have neither looks or scent to recommend them are the Amanths (Amaranthaceae). The family provides some attractive flowers such as the Cockscombs (Celosia) with their vivid tassels of yellow and red. But the tassels of the Pilewort in my garden are a dingy green. The stems which develop from a tap root are pale green or often reddish and about twelve inches high. It is often confused with the very similar Redroot (Amarantus retroflexus), but just now it shows the black shining seeds which distinguish it, since those of the Redroot are dark reddish brown. Furthermore its sepals in the female flower (the family has no petals) are pointed while those of the Redroot are not. But you will need a good lens to see the details of the flowers for they are very small and crowded.



(After Allen)



Sepal

Note sharp point formed
by excurrent vein.