

# Filaree

Quail hunters are eternal optimists. And while this season may not be notable, there is already hope for next year. A pending El Nino should bring more rainfall to Texas' quail range this fall and winter. If the climatologists don't let us down, next March should offer a more verdant landscape than last winter. Much of that green cast in West Texas stems from a winter annual forb called filaree.

Filaree is also referred to as stork's bill, crane's bill, and sometimes as tallow weed (though this name is more commonly associated with another winter annual, plantains). The stork's bill name is derived from the similarity of the seeds to that of a crane's bill.

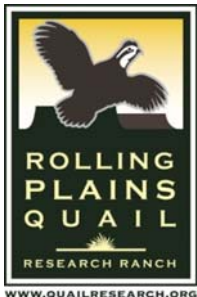
Texas is home to two species, Texas filaree (*Erodium texanum*), and California filaree (*Erodium cicutarium*). For additional photographs of each, check the Noble Foundation's Plant Image Gallery at [www.noble.org](http://www.noble.org).

Texas filaree is native, whereas California filaree is an introduced species that came over from Europe several hundred years ago. Texas filaree has heart-shaped leaves and violet flowers. California filaree has leaves more like a carrot or hemlock (hence its specific epithet "cicutarium"; *Cicuta* is the Latin name for hemlock). Its flowers are smaller than those of Texas filaree and are pink to violet in color.

Seems to me that Texas filaree tends to be more common on more droughty, shallower sites, while California filaree is more common on deeper, more fertile soils. But the two may be found side by side on some sites.

Both species come up annually from seeds, or at least in those years when we have good fall rains. They spend the winter as prostrate rosettes. By early March they're about the diameter of a saucer.

I'm excited at the response of filaree (both species) to some prescribed burns we conducted at RPQRR in early August. It looks like a food plot.





Filarees seem to be a staple for salads by Tom (Turkey) and Bob (White). Much of the greens that you will find in quails' crops this winter will likely be comprised of filaree. I'm amazed at how fat some of the blue quail I've seen over the years have been, and they seem to have lived high on the hog from a diet of filaree greens. I've also seen the seeds themselves (without the awns) in quail crops in late winter during a dry year.

Some biologists (I do) speculate that a diet of greens during late winter may "prime the reproductive pump" of game birds. It's my observation that a good filaree crop tends to correlate with good reproduction next summer.

I don't recommend that you build your range management plans around any annual species. It can be like the

house built upon sand — here today, gone tomorrow. One's rangeland should be built upon a "rock", i.e., deep-rooted perennials. But annuals like filaree are like a bird nest on the ground when conditions are right.

The seeds of filaree have an awn that facilitates their dispersal and ultimately their planting (similar to Texas wintergrass). For a close-up view, refer to <http://waynesword.palomar.edu/fruitid2.htm>.

You will find them particularly annoying next month if your Yorkies accompany you afield like mine do. But teasing seeds out of a Yorkie's pelage is a small price to pay for a spring bonanza.

