

A Pair of Filaree's
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Winter proves to be a harsh period for browsers and grazers having few green choices available to them. The further south you go in Texas insulates some plants from the harsh freezes common in the middle and northern parts of the state. When winter months are combined with adequate moisture a good crop of winter annuals can be counted upon to furnish green grazing for all. This is the time of the year when Texas filaree, *Erodium Texanum*, and California filaree, *E. cicutarium*, grow and produce excellent forage for livestock and wildlife. Interestingly, Texas filaree is native to the United States while California filaree is introduced to not only California but all of the United States.

However, both species of filaree provides desirable forage during the winter months that is readily eaten by livestock, deer and antelope. Bobwhite and scaled quail readily eat the green foliage during winter, especially in February as the seed supply on the soil surface decreases. Crude protein has been measured at 14 percent during March and April with high energy values as well.

These plants begin growth as a prostrate rosette in the fall and then grows on horizontal stems up to 16 inches in length for Texas filaree and up to 24 inches for California filaree. The leaves show a striking difference with those of Texas filaree being alternate or opposite, 1 to 1 ½ inches in length, rounded with 3 to 5 palmate lobes, round-toothed and long stalked. California filaree leaves are opposite, up to 2 inches long, triangular in shape with finely dissected pinnate lobes that are further divided with deep clefts. Flowers of Texas are either single or several, growing in clusters from leaf axils on short branches, having 5 purple petals with darker purple veins, ¾ to 1 inch across. Flowers of California grow in clusters of 2 to 5 at the ends of long axillary stems, having 5 petals, purple or lavender, but being only about ⅜ inch across.

The fruits of both species are quite interesting with each having 5 seeds, assuming the 5 flowers were fully pollinated, that appear like small rockets arranged around a central shaft. Each seed looks like a small spear with the seed itself being the spear point and the attached awn resembling the shaft of the spear. These seeds are about 3/16 inch in length with the awns or tails being 1½ to 2 inches on California and 1 ½ to 2 ½ inches on Texas filaree. Each of the 2 to 5 seedpods of California filaree usually grows pointing straight up and resembles the shape of a crane's bill. The seedpods of Texas filaree may appear as singles and are sometimes pointed upward. At maturity each of the seeds begins to coil around and break away from the style-column that has held the seeds like a circular row of rockets. The seed or spear point has short hairs that act as barbs to help pull the seed through vegetation and into the soil. Each seed will twist itself into the ground ensuring the reproduction of the species. The immature seeds with awns resemble the seeds of Texas wintergrass that also twist and curl as they mature. Quail will break off the awn and eat the seed or spear point.

Both species of filaree are widespread and common winter annuals, especially on clayey and sandy loam soils, disturbed areas, old fields and waste places. An abundance of filaree often indicates heavily grazed situations in which filaree responds favorably to reduced grass cover. During dry fall and winters, the presence of filaree will be greatly reduced as will the potential for forage. It should be considered bonus forage when the moisture is adequate. In early

spring about 10 years ago near Colorado City I dug up what might have been the Texas state record for Texas filaree. This one plant was wider than the lid of a pickup toolbox, hanging over both sides. Unfortunately, those pictures are on a portable hard drive that no longer opens so the photos are likely lost forever. What is not lost is the opportunity each winter for new crops of filaree to grow and provide green forage during this drab season.

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Photo Captions:

1 Early rosette stage of growth of Texas filaree during early winter.



2 Almost dinner plate sized rosette of Texas filaree beginning to initiate rapid growth and length of stems, good grazing is almost here.



3 Lush growth of California filaree showing flowers and emerging seedpods which resembles a crane's bill.



4 California filaree flowers growing in clusters during mid-March of a wet winter.



5 Texas filaree flowers more often seen as singles as are the seedpods.



6 Mature seeds of Texas filaree lie upon the ground with the awns beginning to twist and curl ensuring the seeds are planted.



7 During dry winters this annual forb must try and produce a new seed crop at the cost of not much forage being produced.

