

Yellow Wood Sorrel
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Yellow wood sorrel, also known as sheep sorrel, is a common native forb that is very showy in the spring to early summer period. Two species of wood sorrel are most common across Texas, *Oxalis drummondii* and *Oxalis stricti*. The botanical name of Oxalis has ties to the sweet and sour taste you sense upon chewing the leaves of wood sorrel.

Yellow wood sorrel is a low-growing perennial with erect to creeping branches and many flowered stalks extending from a slender taproot. Although it grows from what appears to be a cluster of stems there are no rhizomes found under these plants, just a single taproot. The plant grows from 4 to 10 inches tall in a compact mass. The stems and leaves are covered with soft hairs. The leaves are palmately divided into three heart-shaped lobes. The leaves tend to fold in the evenings or when cloudy. Flowers appear with five green sepals tucked under the five yellow petals which are either united at the base or free at the base. Each petal has a length of about ½ inch. The flowers can be single or several and form from the axil of the leaves and stems. The fruit is an erect four-angled and ribbed capsule, resembling a tiny okra pod, about ½ inch long, from which many small seeds are thrown when pods mature. The leaves might be mistaken for clover but the heart-shaped notch in the leaves of wood sorrel differentiate it from the rounded leaves of clovers.

The leaves and stems of wood sorrel are readily eaten by all classes of livestock, deer and antelope. Forage value for deer and antelope is good. Crude protein has been measured at 20 to 22 percent during spring and summer and dropping to 17 percent in November with high to very high energy values. Turkey and quail will readily consume the leaves, stems, and immature green pods. Quail and song birds will eat the ripe seeds.

When I was first hired by the Soil Conservation Service in 1982 my training location was at Goldthwaite. While there I bought a small incubator and was hatching Pharaoh quail and chukar partridges as a hobby. In late spring of 1983 I put three turkey eggs in the incubator and all three hatched, one tom and two hens. I built a four foot by eight foot frame, now resembling a high tunnel, and put chicken wire on the sides and top with the open bottom of the frame resting on the ground. I would pull the cage across the yard to give the poults new grazing. After each move of the cage I would watch them forage on the new vegetation available and the first plant they picked was wood sorrel. They searched it out and pulled pieces of it as if it was a delicacy. This was during early summer and the wood sorrell was growing as a weed in our back yard.

Yellow wood sorrel is edible by humans and adds a tart flavor to salads or for a quick bite while in the pasture. The lemony sour taste you sense is oxalic acid crystals that are naturally occurring in the plant. The plants are high in vitamin C. Native Americans would brew a tea to build up the blood and stop vomiting or use the flowers in a poultice to reduce swelling. Wood sorrel can be found in most soil types and in open prairies, pastures, roadsides, riparian areas, light woods and lawns. There is a violet colored species called violet wood sorrel that is native to the eastern half of Texas that will also be seen. There are ten species of wood sorrel's that occur within parts of Texas. Next time you are out on the land take a bite of yellow wood sorrel and see if you agree with the tart taste, after all it is said turkeys are smart birds and would not steer you wrong.

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Photo Captions:

1 The heart-shaped notch in the leaves identifies all species of wood sorrel.



2 Leaves of Yellow wood sorrel showing the folded appearance seen in the evenings or during drought stress.



3 Yellow wood sorrel, *O. stricta*, begins flowering in late spring and are still flowering and producing okra-like seed capsules as shown here in a late September photo.



4 Yellow wood sorrel showing the low growth typical of this desirable native forb.



5. The compact growth of yellow wood sorrel is usually about as wide as it is tall and remains low growing throughout the summer

