

Creeping Bellflower



A specimen of creeping bellflower, *Campanula rapunculoides*, in a garden.

Creeping bellflower, *Campanula rapunculoides*, is a too-vigorous herbaceous perennial native to Europe, Western Asia and the Caucasus. The specific name *rapunculoides*, meaning like *Rapunculus*, refers to a now obsolete name for a group of bellflowers, meaning “little turnip” (for the roots). One common name in Europe is rampion, after which the Old World fairy tale figure Rapunzel is named. In that story her father steals a rampion plant from a witch’s magic garden to aid his wife in childbirth, and as punishment Rapunzel is exiled to a tower. Other common names include creeping bluebell, European bellflower, garden bluebell, June bell, rampion bellflower, and rover bellflower. The leaves, shoots and roots of this plant are edible, and it was once grown for culinary purposes.

In its native range creeping bellflower is found mainly in open woodlands, forest edges, and meadows.



Creeping bellflower, *Campanula rapunculoides*, in bloom.

It was brought to North America as an ornamental, but is now considered an invasive weed by most people, despite its attractive flowers. In Wisconsin it is listed as a “restricted invasive plant.” It grows in almost any soil in wet or dry conditions, reseeds readily and spreads by rhizomes and root fragments. Even the smallest root piece is capable of regenerating, so it is exceptionally difficult to eliminate by cultivation or digging out plants. In rich soil it can take over beds and move into lawns. In more difficult

locations (drier or heavier soils) it can be a low-maintenance plant for covering large areas - but be sure it won’t move off your property into natural areas (and deadhead to prevent self-seeding).



Creeping bellflower can be an aggressive weed in gardens and lawns.

Hardy in zone 3-9, creeping bellflower is naturalized in many parts of North America, and is classified as a noxious weed in some states or provinces. It cannot be recommended as a useful ornamental plant; avoid introducing it in your garden! It is often found in disturbed areas, along roadsides, in fields and forest plantations, and as a lawn weed. This plant is often inadvertently spread in contaminated commercial seed and nursery stock.



The heart-shaped leaves growing on the tall stems are irregularly toothed.

Creeping bellflower produces erect, unbranched green to purple stems 1-3 feet tall. The basal leaves are wider and heart-shaped while the leaves on the stems gradually become shorter and more narrow with shorter (or no) petioles toward the top. The largest leaves are up to 5" long and 2" wide. The opposite foliage is coarse and irregularly toothed, with small blunt teeth. The leaves are dark green on the upper surface and light green below, with short hairs along the underside of the leaf veins.

The lavender to purple-blue, bell-shaped flowers bloom from early summer through fall. Peak flowering in southern Wisconsin is in July. The corolla of each flower is 1-1½" long with 5 recurved, pointed lobes. The corolla is surrounded by 5 much smaller, green lanceolate sepals.

The flower has 5 stamens and an exerted white or pale purple style with 3 curled stigmas. The flowers occur in a terminal raceme (unbranched cluster) with a number of slightly nodding or drooping flowers on short pedicels along one side of the stem. There is a small leafy bract at the base of each pedicel. They open from the bottom up the slender flower stems.



Creeping bellflower produces clusters of flowers along the upright stems, with nodding, bell-shaped flowers.

The flowers are followed by spherical seed capsules that each contain several small, shiny, tan to light brown seeds that ripen in late summer and fall. The light-weight, elliptical seeds have small wings or ridges for wind dispersal. Vigorous plants can produce up to 15,000 seeds annually and self-sow readily.



Creeping bellflower spreads by short stolons.

They may occur in dense patches, spreading by short stolons. There are both slender surface roots and deeper, fibrous and bland-tasting, tuber-like roots up to 18" long and about an inch in diameter. It is not picky about soil, although it prefers moist, rich soil in sun or partial shade. Plants do

not grow as fast or spread as much in heavier or drier soils – but they still do just fine in clay (and the masses of thick white roots are harder to get out). This species may overwhelm other less vigorous plants. Slugs do like this plant, and feeding in spring can damage plants significantly in some circumstances, but usually not enough to eliminate an infestation. It is not preferred by deer.

Creeping bellflower is very difficult to eradicate. It is nearly impossible to control it by digging or pulling the roots and even chemical control is difficult. Non-selective herbicides, such as glyphosate, can be effective, but it may require several applications to eliminate all the roots.



A young creeping bellflower plant.

Other common species that resemble creeping bellflower include:

- *Campanula glomerata* (Clustered Bellflower) produces a cluster of more erect flowers at the top of each central stem. The sepals are longer and wider than those of *C. rapunculoides*.
- *Campanula rotundifolia* (Harebells) has linear leaves and the flowers are usually less than an inch long. Plants are also usually shorter.
- *Campanulastrum americanum* (= *Campanula americana*, American Bellflower) is a native plant with flowers that have widely spreading lobes, forming a more star-shaped bloom from the shallow corolla.



Campanula glomerata

– Susan Mahr, University of Wisconsin - Madison

Additional Information:

- *Campanula rapunculoides* – on Missouri Plants.com at www.missouriplants.com/Bluealt/Campanula_rapunculoides_page.html
- Creeping Bellflower – on the Wildflowers of Illinois website at www.illinoiswildflowers.info/weeds/plants/cr_bellflower.htm
- A Performance Appraisal of Hardy Bellflowers – Plant Evaluation Notes of the Chicago Botanic Garden at www.chicagobotanic.org/downloads/planteval_notes/no31_bellflower.pdf