

Pause for Plants, April 28, 2006: **Native Weed, Makin' Wheelies...**

Carolina Bristle Mallow (*Modiola caroliniana*) is blooming. Bristle refers to hairs on its stems, though I wouldn't describe them exactly as bristles! It is a perennial plant that creeps along and can root from where leaves grow out of the stem (nodes), thus an alternative common name "Creeping Mallow." In favorable locations the plant can carpet large areas. You've probably "weeded" this orange flowered member of the Mallow family out of your yard and/or garden.



Carolina Mallow's small colorful flowers open when it's sunny, and they may be salmon to orange red or purplish-red. Its leaves may be more (in the spring) or less (in the fall) deeply cleft in a palmate pattern.

So how does this creeping weed make wheelies? All it has to do is bloom and make fruit! If you examine Carolina Mallow's circular fruits, you'll notice a shape and pattern much like a wagon or

bicycle wheel viewed from the side. Fruits turn from green to very black as they ripen and eventually "fall apart" releasing their seeds. The genus name *Modiola* comes from the Latin "modiolus", which means hub of a wheel.



There are around 2000 species in the mallow family whose members are most abundant in the tropics. Familiar cultivated showy flowered species include hibiscus and hollyhock. Other economically important members include okra, delicious to some and despised by others, and the world's number one natural fiber, cotton.

Carolina Mallow is a New World native that has managed to "wheel" its way around the world. It originated in the Americas and is found throughout our southern states into California and Oregon. It has traveled east to Europe and westward over to Hawaii. In Australia and New Zealand Carolina Mallow is reported to be host plant for their blue moon butterfly. Plants do get around!