



## July's Weed of the Month: Speedwell (*Veronica* spp.)

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There are actually over 95 species of *Veronica*, commonly known as speedwell, throughout the state of New York, with about a dozen occurring in the landscape; two of the most prevalent being corn speedwell and slender speedwell. There is no single characteristic that identifies a plant as a speedwell, but the seed pods are generally heart shaped and flowers are often bright blue to white, always with 4 petals and a low-growing prostrate canopy.

**Description:** Corn speedwell is a *winter annual* with ascending branched stems (usually 5-15 cm in height) radiating from the base of the plant. The lower leaves are near round with toothed margins, the upper leaves are more pointed. The plant is covered with fine hairs. Corn speedwell flowers are small and white to blue in color. The flowers are found in the leaf axis and the seed develops into a distinctive heart shape. Slender speedwell is a prostrate, *creeping perennial* with slender stolons, small round leaves with scalloped leaf margins, and attractive light blue flowers in the spring. Slender speedwell has a tendency to form dense mats, particularly in turf grass. The stems grow to 50 cm and root at the nodes.



Slender speedwell prefers moist sites in turf  
(Photo courtesy of Weedalert.com)



Corn speedwell thrives in dry sites (Photo courtesy of [www.umassgreeninfo.org](http://www.umassgreeninfo.org))

**Reproduction:** Corn speedwell reproduces via its seed which germinates in late summer, fall, or early spring, and sometimes throughout the entire growing season in cool, moist

areas. Slender speedwell reproduction is predominately vegetative in North America. Creeping and fragmented stems can root at the nodes. Even 1cm long stem fragments with a single node can produce adventitious roots and continue to grow. Plants can be spread by mowers, in lawn clippings, yard compost, or landscape plant material.



A typical speedwell flower (Photo by Richard Uva)

**Habitat/Distribution:** Corn speedwell is a weed of lawns, landscapes, nursery crops, and cereals and is also found in waste areas. In cultivated sites, fall or spring cultivation provides effective control. Corn speedwell primarily grows in dry, sandy or rocky soils and well-drained shaded lawns and woods and is a common lawn and landscape weed in the northeastern and upper Midwestern states. Slender speedwell, in contrast, is primarily a weed of turf grass and adjoining landscapes and is found only in lawns, gardens, parks and golf courses. It does not tolerate cultivation and, thus, is rarely found in cultivated fields. Slender

speedwell also tolerates a wide variety of soil types but thrives in cool, moist, shaded turf, on nutrient-rich soils. It was originally introduced into the Northeast as an ornamental in the 1920s and has since spread across the US.

**Control Methods:** The competitiveness of both speedwells can be reduced by maintaining a dense stand of healthy turf grass. Fertilize turf in the fall and maintain good disease and insect control programs. Chemical control may be needed to eradicate invading speedwells, especially in turf grass areas which are thin, or in newly seeded areas. Use a selective post emergent herbicide taking care to follow spray intervals for newly seeded areas. For optimum control, make herbicide applications to actively growing speedwell in the 4 leaf to flower stage and repeat later in the fall if necessary. Corn speedwell will thrive in droughty conditions whereas slender speedwell prefers moist soil. After last year's extreme drought, we are seeing more corn speedwell than usual in turf which was previously stressed. Established stands of veronicas can be treated with a selective postemergent herbicide containing triclopyr or dicamba now, in liquid or granular fertilizer mixtures. Turf that is thin should be fertilized in the spring or early summer and reseeded in the fall, followed by a fall fertilizer application.