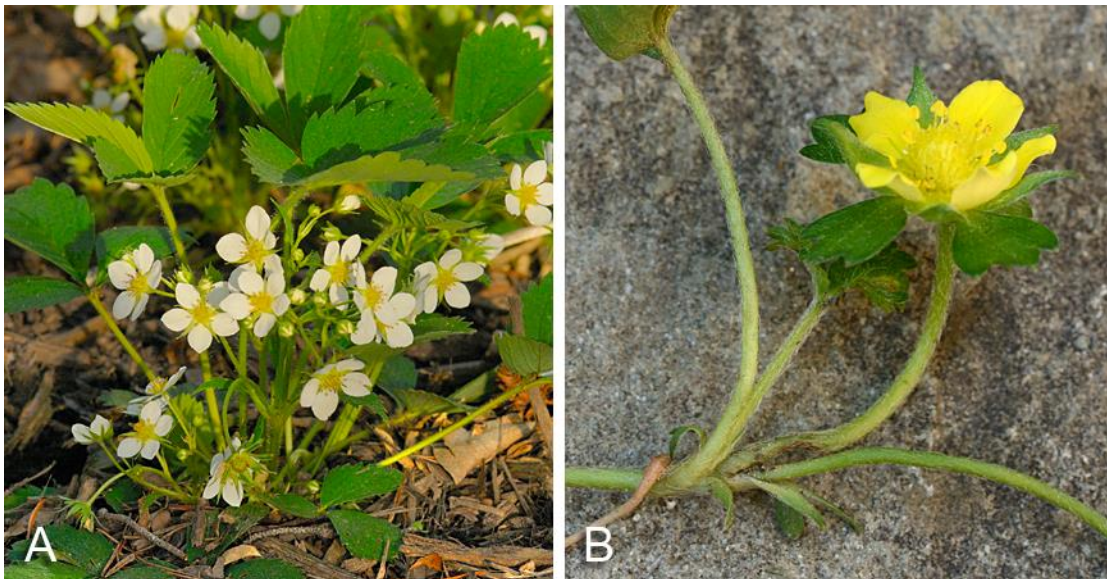


## The Scoop on Wild Strawberries

By Greg Sykes ([greg@grsykes.com](mailto:greg@grsykes.com))

Parkland habitat restoration sometimes includes replanting a cleared, previously weed-choked area with native species. One such valuable plant appearing on the repatriation list is the wild strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*). Upon hearing about that selection, people often reply, “Oh, I have tons of wild strawberries growing in my yard.” Chances are those plants are not true wild strawberries, especially if they creep into the lawn.

True wild strawberries have several distinguishing characteristics. In early to mid-spring when it blooms, each flower possessing five white petals and a yellow center. These flowers provide nectar for many pollinating insects, especially bees and some butterflies. Several weeks after blooming, a small strawberry (usually between 0.5-0.75 inches tall) emerges. Despite its diminutive size, this strawberry packs a huge flavor! In fact, the commercial strawberry hybrids get their tastiness from *F. virginiana* and their size from another species. However, the edible portion is a swollen flower part called the receptacle. The true fruits, technically named achenes, are what many people call the “seeds.” In wild strawberries, these yellowish fruits appear within indentations along the ripe, red receptacle. Wild strawberries hang downward from the stem. Once strawberries fall (or more likely get devoured by birds, box turtles, and other animals) later in the spring, the fruiting season finishes for the year. The foliage—each leaf consisting of three leaflets—remains green throughout much of the year with moderate winter dieback. This approximately six-inch-tall groundcover offers shelter to many critters (e.g., salamanders, toads, and a menagerie of invertebrates) and forage for others, such as deer and rabbits.

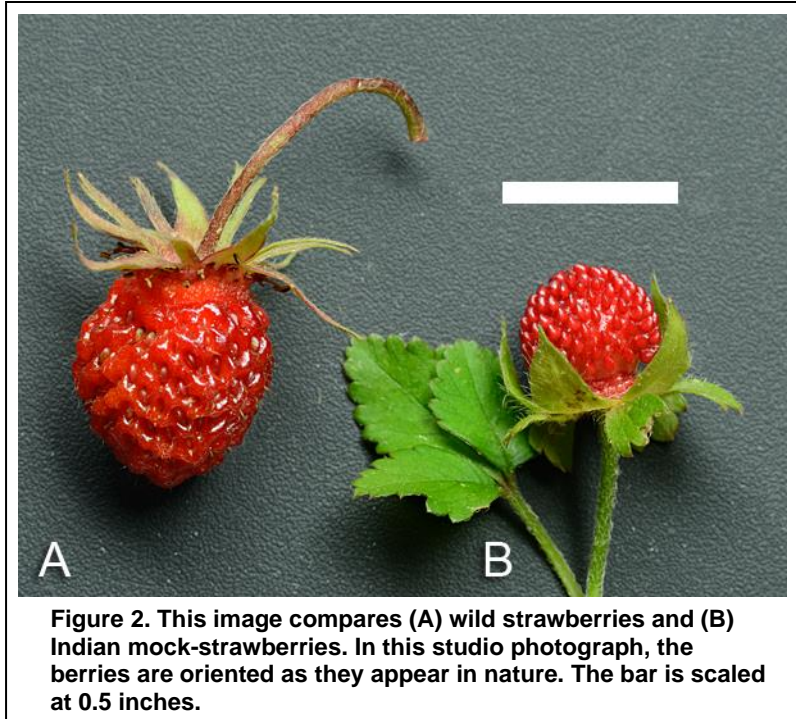


**Figure 1. (A) During spring, look for wild strawberries blooming in clusters of white flowers. (B) Indian mock-strawberries produce yellow blossoms throughout the growing season. Some flowers might emerge from the central plant whereas others develop along stolons (seen here)—long, thin, rooting stems that meander along the ground.**

What most folks have growing on their property and incorrectly identify as “wild strawberries” are *Potentilla indica*, better known as the Indian mock-strawberry. The term “Indian” refers to its Southeast Asian homeland and not to Native Americans. These plants bloom with yellow flowers from spring through autumn. The plant churns out mock-strawberries throughout the growing season, too. Unlike true strawberries, the flavorless mock-strawberry is smaller (between 0.25-0.5 inches) and the red “seeds” protrude outside of the swollen, scarlet, upward-pointing receptacle. While wild strawberries experience difficulty living through a lawnmower’s weekly chop, the smaller, nuisance *Potentilla* thrive in turf zones. Rid your garden of mock-strawberries by hand-pulling them. Also manually remove and use corn gluten-

based weed control to manage the ones muscling onto lawns. Though a non-native species, Indian mock-strawberry is currently considered a low ecological threat and therefore not an Invasive Management Area (IMA) program target.

The next time you are shopping for a groundcover, consider using native wild strawberries. They flourish under many conditions, preferring dry, open areas. Pruning or barriers easily control the patches. Wild strawberries help create a beneficial environment while rewarding you with a tasty snack!



**Figure 2. This image compares (A) wild strawberries and (B) Indian mock-strawberries. In this studio photograph, the berries are oriented as they appear in nature. The bar is scaled at 0.5 inches.**

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