Chicory

Cichorium intybus

FAMILY	Asteraceae – Daisies & Sunflowers	**ORIGIN**	Mediterranean
LIFE CYCLE	Perennial	**OTHER NAMES**	Blue Sailors, Italian dandelion, Coffeeweed, Wild endive, Radicchio

QUICK FACTS

- The plant thrives in sunny, disturbed habitats such as fields, roadsides, rail corridors, and waste areas. It spreads through **both seeds and root fragments**, with seeds moving primarily via animals, machinery, hay, and other human activities.
- Chicory tolerates a wide range of soils and uses its **3–5 foot** taproot to access deep moisture, making it drought- resistant and hard to remove. It re-sprouts after mowing or grazing, flowers for months, and can grow tall enough to shade out native species.
- Chicory grows **2–4 feet** tall and produces bright blue, daisy- like flowers that last only a day. Its basal leaves resemble dandelion but are consistently rough and hairy, and its deep taproot exudes milky sap when cut.

Chicory is a hardy perennial herb that has spread widely across New Mexico, especially in disturbed areas such as roadsides, pastures, and open fields. Its bright blue flowers make it easy to spot, but its deep taproot, persistent basal leaves, and ability to regrow after cutting or grazing allow it to establish quickly and persist even under harsh conditions.

What does it look like?

Chicory is a taprooted perennial herb that grows to 2-4 feet tall. It produces bright blue daisy-like flowers that cluster at the tops of the stems. Its lower lance-shaped, dandelion-like, basal leaves, which are 3-6 inches long, are irregularly or unevenly toothed, cut or lobed, and have rough, hairy surfaces. Upper stem leaves are smaller with clasping bases. The deep, fleshy taproot exudes milky sap when cut.



Mikhial Parison, Taos Soil & Water Conservation District

Stem: **Green with a shift toward reddish brown near the base, where the surface is noticeably hairy. The upper portions of the plant lose that texture and remain smooth.**



Mikhial Parison, Taos Soil & Water Conservation District

Roots: Early roots are fibrous, but transition to a more pronounced taproot. The taproots can grow up to 3-5 feet deep. This allows them to withstand drought and recover from stressors such as pests and disease. The root usually grows 2-4 inches thick.

Leaves: The leaves are green and rough to the touch. The underside of the leaves varies; some are roughly hairy, while others are smooth. The shape may vary, being lanceolate (narrow oval) to oblanceolate (a pointed base of a narrow oval). The leaf edge, or margin, has deep indentations (lobes), but as the leaves move up the stem, the leaves' margins have more pointed teeth (dentate).



Mikhial Parison, Taos Soil & Water Conservation District

Flowers: Each flower is a clear sky blue, though pink or white blooms sometimes appear. They reach about an inch and a half across and are made up entirely of strap-shaped ray petals, each ending in five small teeth. No disc flowers appear in the center.



Mikhial Parison, Taos Soil & Water Conservation District

Seeds: Seeds grow inside a fruit, which can be green, orange, or brown, and grow from the flower. The seeds are about 4mm long, red or blackish-red, have a rough surface, and are somewhat triangular, like an orange wedge. African rue plants can produce thousands of seeds per plant, with approximately 1,000 fruits per plant and 50 seeds per fruit.

Impact and Management

Economic

If chicory becomes established in agricultural fields, rangelands, or managed pastures, it can compete directly with crops and desirable forage species for essential resources such as soil moisture, nutrients, growing space, and sunlight. Dense infestations may reduce the vigor and productivity of neighboring plants, leading to lower crop yields and decreased forage availability for livestock. In pasture settings, heavy chicory growth can alter plant community composition by outcompeting more valuable forage species, ultimately reducing overall forage quality and carrying capacity.



Mikhial Parison, Taos Soil & Water Conservation District

Biodiversity

In natural areas, chicory can spread into disturbed sites such as roadsides, grasslands, abandoned fields, and other unmanaged habitats, where it may compete with native vegetation for sunlight, water, nutrients, and space. As populations expand, chicory can reduce the abundance of native plants and alter the composition of plant communities. This loss of native vegetation can diminish habitat quality and food resources for wildlife that depend on diverse native plant species, ultimately affecting local biodiversity and ecosystem function.

Chicory is a perennial that reproduces by seed and root fragments, so the best management is to prevent seed production and eradicate its roots either by complete removal or herbicides. Mechanical methods such as pulling or digging can be effective if you remove the taproot completely. Mechanical methods are usually best for residential areas or small infestations. Mowing is not recommended because it stimulates flower production and disperses seeds. Removing the inflorescence just below the root crown will reduce its vigor, but you should also bag the biomass, as seeds can mature and germinate if left in place. A prescribed fire can kill the seeds if hot enough but will not affect the deep taproot. Fire effects are untested.

DO's

- Removing young rosettes early makes control far easier because the taproot hasn't yet driven deep into the soil.
- Excavating the full taproot prevents regrowth, since even small root pieces can regenerate new plants.
- Stopping chicory from flowering keeps thousands of seeds out of the soil seed bank and slows future spread.

DON'Ts

- Leave root fragments because chicory readily regenerates from broken taproot sections.
- Ignore soil disturbance as compacted or nutrient-poor soil creates ideal conditions for chicory to establish.
- Let plants flower since flowering leads directly to heavy seed production and long-term persistence.

TAOS SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

EAST RIO ARRIBA SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

For more information on managing chicory, please visit www.nmweeds.org