

Microsteris gracilis (Hooker) Greene, SLENDER PHLOX, BEGGAR'S GILIA, ANNUAL PHLOX. Annual, taprooted, not rosetted, 1-stemmed at base but often branched above, decumbent to erect, 6–20 cm tall; shoots glandular-hairy especially above midplant, the glandular hairs pale yellow-tipped to pink-tipped. **Stems:** cylindric, to 2 mm diameter. **Leaves:** opposite decussate \pm throughout or helically alternate from below the lowest branch upward, occasionally subopposite in inflorescence, simple, sessile and weakly clasping, with pairs often \pm fused across node, without stipules; blade narrowly elliptic to narrowly lanceolate or oblanceolate, 10–30 \times 1.5–5 mm, broadly tapered and weakly clasping at base, entire (with 1 or 2 minute teeth per edge), acute at tip, with only midrib conspicuous, sparsely puberulent becoming glabrescent (including margins). **Inflorescence:** cyme, terminal and axillary, with 1 or 2 flowers per axil, with pedicels, if 2 flowers per node then 1 pedicel short and the other much longer; bract = subtending leaf; peduncle and pedicels densely glandular-pubescent, pedicel < calyx. **Flower:** bisexual, radial, 3–4 mm wide; **calyx** 5-lobed with 5 ribs united by membranes, 5–7(–10) mm long, the ribs glandular-hairy, becoming lobes near midpoint; lobes ascending, 3–4 mm long, membranous panels in lower 0.5–1 mm, green, acuminate with hard point at tip, veins obscure, inner surface nonglandular-hairy; during fruit development tube splitting downward along membrane panel causing longer lobes to spread; **corolla** 5-lobed, trumpet-shaped (salverform), strongly twisted in bud; tube + throat \geq calyx, yellowish; lobes spreading, narrowly heart-shaped, 1.2–2 mm long, light pink to white with rose-pink or dark rose spot at base, aging darker; **stamens** 5, fused to corolla throat at different levels alternate with corolla lobes, included; filaments \pm 0.5 mm long; anthers dorsifixed, dithecal, 0.3–0.5 mm long, golden yellow, longitudinally dehiscent; pollen golden yellow; **nectary disc** surrounding ovary base, ringlike, very thin; **pistil** 1; ovary superior, ellipsoid, 1–1.5 mm long. 3-chambered, each chamber with 1 ovule attached to center; style included, slender, 3–4 mm long, 3-branched approaching tip, the stigmatic region ca. 0.3 mm long. **Fruit:** capsule, loculicidal, 3-valved, 3-seeded, broad-ellipsoid, 3–4 mm long, with valves detaching and breaking apart. **Seed:** 3-sided ovoid, 2.5–2.9 \times 1.7–1.8 mm, brownish, slightly warty to wrinkled and commonly with a slight medial ridge on convex side, slightly rimmed along margin of other side and with longitudinal groove between 2 flat faces; mucilaginous when wetted. Early February–early April.

Native. Early springtime annual inconspicuously growing in grassland. In range *Microsteris gracilis* is known mostly from slopes south of Westlake Village, e.g., near Lake Eleanor, Triunfo Creek Park, and Las Virgenes Reservoir, as well as at Cornell Corners in Agoura Hills, but it should be searched for elsewhere. *Microsteris* is a small-flowered annual that is closely allied to *Phlox* and is sometimes forced into that genus as a discordant element; evidence is building to recognize this as a lineage that diverged before *Phlox*.

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