

Stephanomeria virgata Benth., TWIGGY WREATH PLANT, VIRGATE STEPHANOMERIA, ROD WIRELETTUCE. Annual, green-stemmed (photosynthetic; wandlike, virgate), taprooted, rosetted, typically 1-stemmed at base, unbranched or with more slender, ascending to spreading, racemelike or paniclelike branches (inflorescences) arising often from every node along main shoot, erect, 50–250 cm tall; shoots with basal leaves and cauline leaves, basal leaves generally withered at flowering; sap milky. **Stems:** cylindric, 2–20 mm diameter at base, tapered upward, tough, green (aging tannish and woody at base), thin stems with 8–10 veins, wider stems to 15-veined, with 3 veins descending from each leaf, internodes short at base increasing upward to ca. 40 mm long; solid and pith white at base, hollow above. **Leaves:** helically alternate, coarsely pinnately lobed (lower leaves) to simple with or without teeth (cauline leaves), sessile, without stipules; blades of basal and lower cauline leaves oblong to lanceolate or narrowly oblanceolate, to 180 × 45 mm, the largest lower cauline, often partially fused to stem, irregularly and shallowly dentate on margins, long-acuminate at tip, pinnately veined with midrib sunken on upper surface and raised on lower surface, glabrous to glabrescent or with short, scattered nonglandular hairs remaining on lower surface; blades of cauline leaves reduced upward, narrowly triangular to triangular-linear or linear gradually reduced to awl-shaped and inconspicuous, narrow cauline leaves sometimes folded up along midrib, low-dentate to remotely dentate or entire on margins, acuminate at tip, pinnately veined, often short-tomentose. **Inflorescence:** heads solitary (several heads in short, axillary, cymelike clusters) in terminal and axillary, racemelike to paniclelike arrays along main axis, head ligulate, 12–15 mm across, of 5–9 flowers (often within a single population), bracteate, glabrate to inconspicuously pubescent; axes of racemelike lateral branches, with 8–40 heads above midpoint, slender and wiry, 25–300+ mm long, green with inconspicuous bracts along axis, the oldest head terminal and heads sequentially developing downward, the bracts along axes ovate to lanceolate, 0.8–2.5 × 0.4–0.9 mm, acute to narrowly rounded at tip, puberulent (minutely glandular) and sometimes with spheroid exudate on surface; peduncle 1–6 mm long, densely covered with bracts, sometimes forming axillary buds to become heads; bracts subtending involucre (calyculus) 4–6, initially appressed later spreading (reflexed), lanceolate, 1.8–4.2 × 0.5–1 mm; **involucre** 7.5–9 mm long, mostly 1.8–2.5 mm wide at base but expanding upward to 4 mm at anthesis. phyllaries 5–8, in 1–2 series, narrowly lanceolate to narrowly oblong, 6.5–8.5 × 1–1.4 mm, green with membranous margins, often becoming purplish red mostly at tip and along midvein, midvein forming ridge to midpoint, overlapped margins of inner phyllaries wide-membranous, glandular-puberulent or not, sometimes short-tomentose at tip; receptacle flat, without bractlets (paleae), glabrous. **Flower:** bisexual, radiate, ± 4 mm across; **calyx (pappus)** of (18–)20–23 bristles in 1 whorl, bristles feathery (plumose), at anthesis 2.9–3.6 mm long, white, not expanded at base, short-barbed on basal 1 mm, the longer lateral hairs ca. 0.3 mm long; **corolla** 5-toothed, glabrous; tube + throat tubular to narrowly funnel-shaped, (2.5–)3.9–4.6 mm long, white, 5-ribbed; limb spreading, broadly spatulate, 8.1–9.5 × 3.8–4.3 mm, whitish or pale purplish pink to pale or light purple on both surfaces, tapered at base, truncate and toothed at tip, the teeth deltate to triangular, 0.4–1 mm long, sometimes dark purplish on lower surface at tip, faintly 6-veined (veins sometimes darker than limb), glabrous; **stamens** 5, fused to top of corolla throat (same level base of V orifice); filaments 0.5–0.8 mm long, white; anthers fused into cylinder surrounding style, generally exerted,

basifixed, dithecal, 3.5–4 mm long, 5-angled, narrowly arrow-shaped to tail-like at base, appendaged at tip, striped purple and whitish with whitish angles and along fused margins, the appendages tonguelike, ca. 0.2 mm long, thin, translucent light purplish, longitudinally dehiscent; pollen whitish; **pistil** 1; ovary inferior, obovoid slightly compressed side-to-side, 1–1.2 × 0.5–0.6 mm, green, circularly rimmed at top, 5-veined, glabrous, 1-chambered with 1 ovule; style erect, 7.7–14 mm long, exserted to 5–7 mm beyond anthers, whitish on to midpoint and purple above midpoint, 2-branched, prominently upward-barbed from just below colored portion to middle of branches, the branches recurved, linear, ca. 0.7 mm long, minutely papillate stigmatic and ± unpigmented on inner face, papillate-hairy above midpoint on outer face. **Fruit:** cypselae, ± oblanceoloid slightly compressed side-to-side, in range 2.8–3.2 × (0.65–)0.8–1.1 mm, dark brown to blackish, 5-sided and 5-angled, smooth to weakly transversely wrinkled or warty on faces; pappus of 18–23 bristles, (3–)3.5–4.5 mm long, whitish, plumose most of length with lateral hairs ca. 0.3 mm long from 1–1.5 mm above base, gradually decreasing to < 0.1 mm long at base. Mid-June–early January.

Native. Annual occurring throughout the range in disturbances and openings of chaparral and coastal sage scrub, as well as along roadcuts. *Stephanomeria virgata* is a widespread, variable species, and two subspecies would be expected within range. Subspecies *virgata* is described as having eight to nine flowers per head, and the calyculus bracts are reflexed. Subspecies *pleurocarpa* is described as having five to six flowers per head, and the calyculus bracts are appressed. However, in range it is common to find five to nine flowers per head within a single population, and the calyculus bracts do not precisely fit subspecies; this suggests that the subspecies are not distinguishable.

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