

Birdsfoot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*)

DESCRIPTION:

Birdsfoot trefoil is a perennial forb in the legume family. This species is native to Europe. In the United States it has been planted widely along roadsides for erosion control and is sold commercially as livestock forage and as ground cover for landscaping. Once this species establishes itself it spreads out in a tangled mat of dense growth, similar to crown vetch. Birdsfoot trefoil threatens the diversity of native plant communities by its aggressive nature. It can tolerate a variety of soil types and is often found in roadsides, fields, prairies and open disturbed areas. This species spreads by seed, rhizomes and above ground runners.

-3
Aggressive
Weed

IDENTIFICATION:

Birdsfoot trefoil's matted plant growth can rise 6-12 in. above the ground. Its leaves are 3-lobed and clover-like with two smaller leaflets at the base of the leaf stalk. The flowers are typically legume shaped and bright yellow. The flowers have clusters of 3-6 at the end of the stems, blooming from June until frost. The slender seedpods are brown to black. At maturity the 10-20 seeds are ejected from each pod. Birdsfoot trefoil gets its name from the bird foot shape of the seedpods. Several sprawling to erect stems emerge from a single root crown. The stems have many branches that become tangled reaching 3 ft long and become woody with age.



CONTROL METHODS:

Organic: This plant can be dug out in loose soil if the population is small enough. Make sure that all of the root fragments are removed. Mowing repeatedly for several years has shown to control this species.

Chemical: Glyphosate (Roundup®, etc.) can be used for foliar application applied. Glyphosate is non-selective and should be used with caution to prevent harm of non-target species. Foliar treatment of clopyralid (Transline®) or aminopyralid (Milestone®) are particularly effective. Clopyralid and aminopyralid herbicides are broadleaf specific and won't harm grasses. These treatments may need to be done for several years to fully eliminate this species. Spot application with these herbicides should be done uniformly with a hand sprayer to ensure the entire leaf is covered for maximum effectiveness of the herbicide. The best time treat birdsfoot trefoil is just as it begins to flower. Always read herbicide labels carefully before use.



NATIVE ALTERNATIVES:

Since this is a full-sun weed we recommend a diverse selection of prairie species to replace and compete against birdsfoot trefoil in order to develop a more stable and productive plant community for the site. Contact us for specific recommendations.