

Yellow sweet clover

Melilotus officinalis

Description

This plant is capable of nitrogen fixation.

Habit

Herbaceous annual or biennial that can grow up to 1 m (3 ft) tall; deep taproot; extensive lateral roots.

Leaves

Compound, alternate, clover leaves with three finely toothed leaflets.

Stems

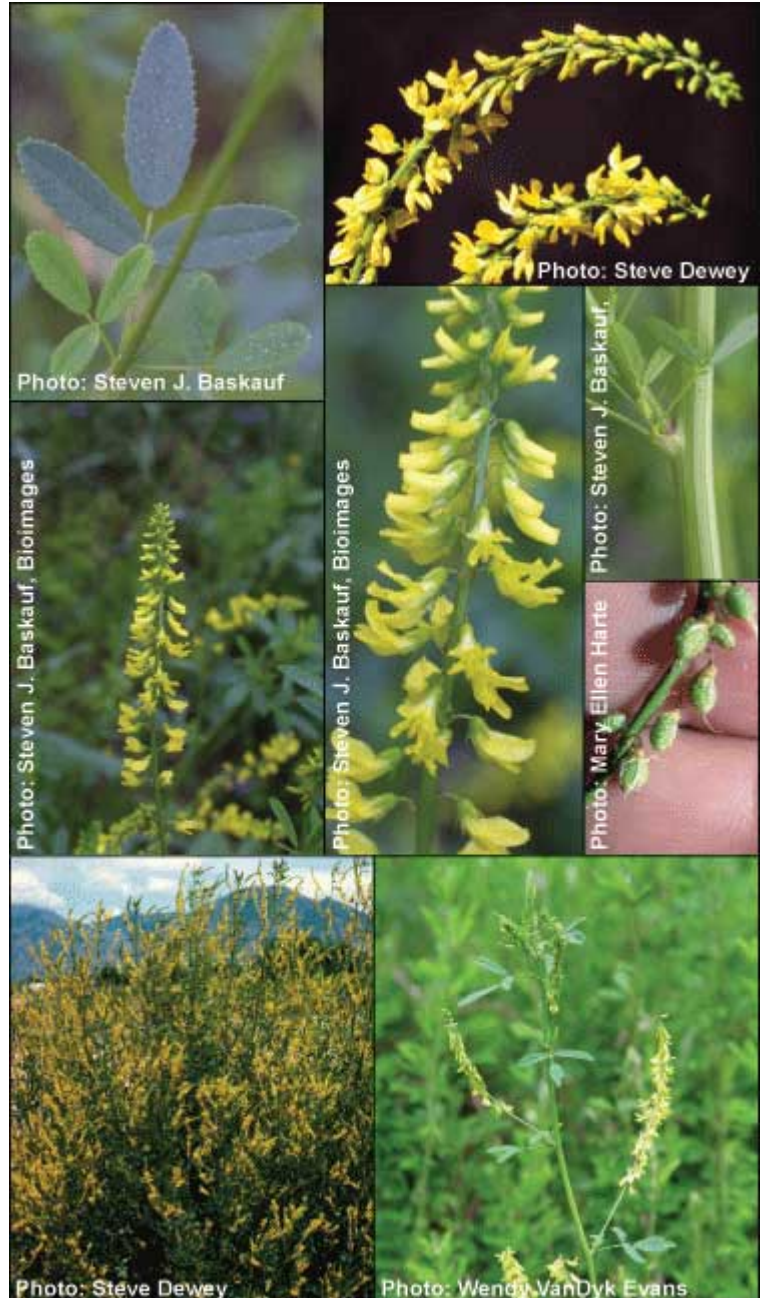
Upright; many-branched; often hollow; leafy stems that may be somewhat spreading near the base giving the plant a bushy appearance.

Flowers

Numerous, yellow in color, pea-like, fragrant, crowded onto elongated stems; bloom May through September.

Fruits and Seeds

Seed pod, tiny, wrinkled, contains 1-2 small





seeds that may remain viable for up to thirty years, seed germination stimulated by burning.

Habitat

Native to Eurasia. Found in open, disturbed sites such as roadsides and old fields; invades prairies, savannas and dunes; shade intolerant; tolerates nutrient poor soils.

Reproduction

By prolific seed production; up to 350,000 seeds per plant.

Similar

Resembles non-native white sweet clover (*Melilotus alba*), which has white rather than yellow flowers; seedlings may also resemble alfalfa (*Medicago* spp.), which has hairs (pubescent) on the leaf underside.

Monitoring and Rapid Response

Monitor open, sunny sites; sweet yellow clover is most easily identified in June and July, while in bloom. For small infestations, pull first year plants in fall, after the root-crown buds have developed; pull second year plants before flowering. Flowering plants should be removed and disposed of so that seed does not develop. Poorly planned prescribed fire will increase infestations; multiple hot burns needed, timing critical, dependent on population age structure. A single burn may also be combined with herbicide application.

Credits

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