

White sweet clover

Melilotus albus

Description

This plant is capable of nitrogen fixation.

Habit

Herbaceous annual or biennial that can grow up to 1.5 m (5 ft) tall; deep taproot; extensive lateral roots.

Leaves

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

Stems

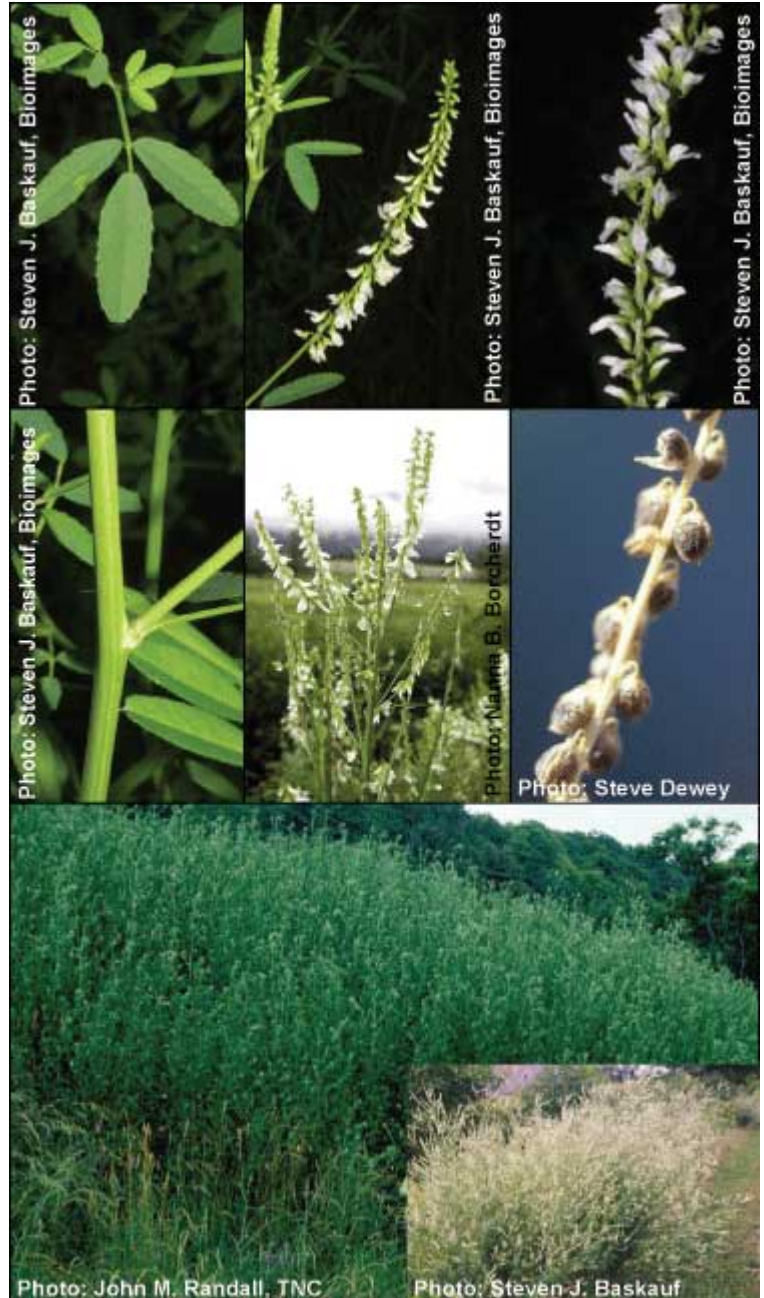
Upright; many-branched; smooth; often hollow; leafy stems that may be spreading near the base giving the plant a bushy appearance.

Flowers

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

Fruits and Seeds

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





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

Habitat

Native to Eurasia. Found in open, dry, disturbed sites such as roadsides and old fields; also found in calcareous soils of sand dunes and prairies. Shade intolerant; will tolerate nutrient poor soils.

Reproduction

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

Similar

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

Monitoring and Rapid Response

Monitor open, sunny sites; sweet white 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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