

Flowering Now



Black Medic (Black Medick)

Scientific Name: *Medicago lupulina* L.

Other Common Names: None-such, Hop-clover, Yellow Trefoil, Black Clover, Hop Medic, English Trefoil

Family: Fabaceae or Bean Family

Related To: Alfalfa (*M. sativa* L.)

Description: Black medic is an annual or short-lived perennial legume that is native to Eurasia and east Africa. The slender, square stems often spread along the ground or they may grow erect (top photo). The compound leaves have three leaflets (trifoliate). The leaflets are oval in shape and the center leaflet has a short petiole (stalk). "Trefoil" (see alternate common names above) is a reference to the trifoliate leaves of this plant.

Black medic produces numerous small yellow flowers held in a tight cluster (previous page, bottom left photo). The common name hop-clover comes from the superficial resemblance of the flower cluster to the hops (*Humulus lupulus* L.) used in brewing beer. After pollination, the flowers form clusters of pods (photo, bottom center). The pods turn black when ripe (photo, bottom right), hence the reference to “black” in the common names. The pod has a network of fibrous tissue in concentric swirls or coils, roughly like the markings on a snail’s shell. Each pod will contain a single small, yellowish-green seed, that is also kidney-shaped. Black medic plants produce abundant seed, the majority of which is hard-seeded and will remain viable in the soil for a long period of time.

Distribution: Black medic can be found in all states, including Alaska and Hawaii.

Uses: Its greatest potential is for use as a winter cover crop. Black medic will not produce large quantities of biomass, but its spreading habit helps to protect the soil surface. It has greater tolerance for poor soils than clovers (*Trifolium* spp.) as long as sufficient soil moisture is available. No cultivars of black medic have been developed for use in the Southeast; however, due to its wide distribution and reliable reseeding, it is possible to manage existing populations as a cover crop. It also has some value as a forage for livestock; however, intake should be managed because it can cause bloat.

Disadvantages: Black medic is a troublesome weed in lawns and gardens.

Additional information:

http://ucanr.org/sites/asi/db/covercrops.cfm?crop_id=8

<http://www.sare.org/Learning-Center/Books/Managing-Cover-Crops-Profitably-3rd-Edition/Text-Version/Legume-Cover-Crops/Medics>

<http://msucares.com/crops/forages/legumes/cool/blackmedic.html>

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep494>