



# Buttercups (*Pasture & Meadows*)



Cursed Crowfoot Photo by:  
Robert H. Mohlenbrock  
Hosted by the USDA-NRCS  
PLANTS Database

*Usually found in moist, open pastures and meadows*

## Description: Cursed Crowfoot

*Ranunculus sceleratus L.:* Cursed crowfoot is an erect plant 4 to 24 inches tall, with smooth, hollow stems that are branched above and support many flowers. Basal and lower stem leaves are kidney-shaped and deeply 3-parted, with segments cleft again or lobed. Upper stem leaves are smaller, and commonly of 3 linear segments. The yellow petals, 1/8-inch-long, are shorter than the green sepals. The numerous seeds, which develop when the flower withers, form short cylindrical heads.

## Occurrence

Cursed crowfoot is a plant of marshes, ditches, and swampy meadows. It ranges from Newfoundland and Quebec to Alaska, south to Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, New Mexico and California.



Tall/Common buttercup Photo by:  
Patrick J. Alexander  
Hosted by the USDA-NRCS  
PLANTS Database

## Description: Tall or Common buttercup

*Ranunculus acris L.:* Tall buttercup is an erect herb, up to 3 feet tall, with smooth or hairy stems that are leafy below the middle. The rosette or basal leaves are stalked. The leaves are kidney-shaped in outline and are deeply cleft into 3 segments that are in turn cleft into oblong or linear lobes. The flowers have deep-yellow (sometimes cream-colored) obovate petals that are 3/8 to 5/8 inch long – about twice the length of the sepals. The seeds are obliquely obovate and smooth and have erect or curved beaks.

## Occurrence

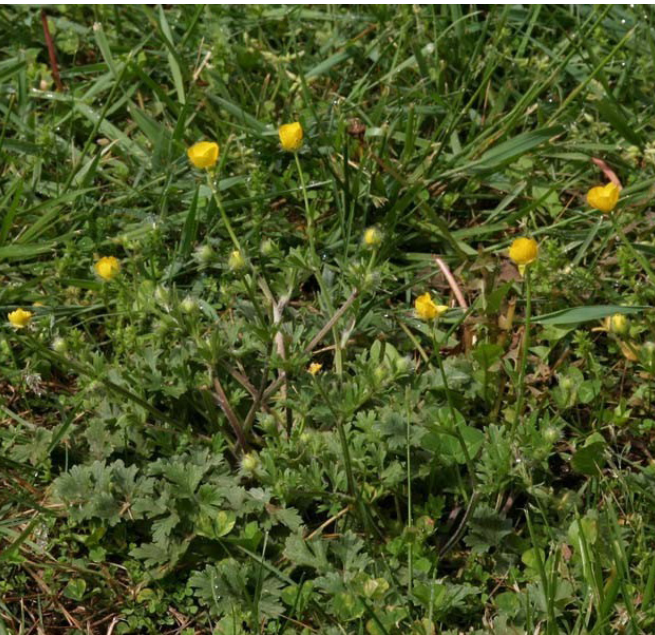
A native or Europe, tall buttercup was introduced into North America, where it has become naturalized from Labrador to Alaska, south to North Carolina, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, and Oregon. In the northeastern states, it is a common weed of lawns, fields, roadsides, meadows, and clearings. In the Midwest, especially in Indian, Illinois, and Missouri, it occurs only along railroads or roadsides, and is not a common cause of poisoning among livestock.

## Conditions of Poisoning

Buttercups usually inhabit moist areas. Animals allowed to graze in woods, in wet meadows, and by ditches and streams browse the buttercups with other succulent plants. All animals are susceptible to buttercup poisoning, but cows are most often poisoned. Dried buttercups are not poisonous, however, and buttercup-infested hay can be fed without danger.

## Control

Animals should not be grazed in pastures heavily infested with buttercups, especially when other herbage is scant or dry. Buttercups are difficult to destroy because of their tendency to inhabit moist and wet places. Mowing the plants each year before they produce seed will keep them from increasing and may eventually destroy them.



### Toxic Principles

All known species of buttercups are poisonous. Cursed crow-foot, the most poisonous of our native species, contains anemonal, an acrid, volatile, very poisonous substance. Presumably, other buttercups contain the same or a similar substance in varying, usually lesser, amounts.

All species of livestock are susceptible to the toxic principle. In lactating cows there is a sharp drop in milk production, and the milk is bitter and red-tinted. Severe poisoning causes abdominal pain, diarrhea, nervousness, twitching of the ears and lips, labored breathing, partial paralysis, and convulsions. Sheep may collapse suddenly; pigs may show paralysis but only minor involvement of the digestive system.

### Necropsy

Inflammation throughout the digestive system is the most significant lesion. In ruminants, there is usually extensive hyperemia in the abomasums and small intestine, with minor involvement of the large intestine.

### Treatment

Demulcents or other agents to protect the stomach and intestine are recommended. There is no known antidote for the toxic principle.

### Information Sources

For a description and discussion of hooked buttercup, small-flowered crowfoot, and swamp buttercup, which usually grow in wooded and old woodland pastures, see Buttercups for wooded areas fact sheet.

### Cocklebur

Xanthium species. For a description and discussion of cockleburs, see that fact sheet.

### References

Evers, Robert A., and Roger P. Link. Poisonous Plants of the Midwest and Their Effects on Livestock, 1972. Special Publication 24, College of Agriculture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



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