

## Illinois Grazing Manual Fact Sheet

### SPECIES • COOL-SEASON PERENNIAL LEGUMES

# Crownvetch



Photo by: Robin R. Buckallew  
Hosted by the USDA-NRCS  
PLANTS Database

### General Information

Crownvetch is a cool-season, perennial legume that may be utilized for livestock grazing, hay production, wildlife habitat, seed production or erosion control. Following are some pros and cons associated with crownvetch.

**Livestock Grazing:** Palatability is high in early growing stages but becomes poor at full maturity because of bitterness from high glycoside content. Protein value can reach 18 percent with optimum fertility and if grazing is properly managed.

**Hay Production:** Yields range from three to four tons per acre. Curing hay may be a problem because of thick, heavy stems.

**Wildlife Habitat:** Crownvetch provides excellent escape cover and nesting for rabbits and quail, and an excellent food source for deer, turkey and rabbits during its young and tender growth stages.

**Seed Production:** Seed is difficult to harvest because seeds mature at different times. Harvesting methods involve a combine or seed stripper.

**Erosion Control:** Crownvetch makes an excellent cover for road banks, farm pond levees, mine spoils and other disturbed areas.

### Adaptability

Crownvetch has a wide range of climatic adaptations, but performance has been much superior on well-drained soils. Crownvetch is tolerant of both low pH and low fertility, but is highly responsive to lime, phosphorus and potassium. Growth usually peaks around the end of May to early June. Varieties available include Emerald, Penngift and Chemung. Seedlings of Emerald and Chemung are more vigorous than Penngift. Chemung and Emerald usually have taller growth and broader leaves than Penngift. Chemung appears to be better adapted to low fertility sites.

### Characteristics

Crownvetch produces creeping stems two to six feet long and grows to a height of three to four feet and looks similar to a young alfalfa plant in seedling stages.

Adult plants produce long, narrow, finger-like seed pods, and the plant may extend to a length of 10 feet or more.

Crownvetch is compatible with Orchard grass and Fescue. It will not tolerate wet soils or shade but is very drought tolerant. Crownvetch is a nonbloating legume, and a good source of nitrogen for associated grasses.



### **Establishment**

Check with the Natural Resources Conservation Service or University Extension for proper seeding rates.

Lime and fertilizer should be applied according to a soil test. The seed should be inoculated. Use a no-till drill on undisturbed soil. On bare soil, disk, roll and then broadcast or drill the seed. If broadcast roll following seeding to ensure good seed-to-soil contact.

Chemical weed control will encourage a good stand.

### **Management**

The growing point of crownvetch is at the top of the plant. Graze when eight inches tall but should not be grazed lower than four inches.

### **Where to Get Help**

For more information about crownvetch, contact the local office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service listed in the telephone directory under "U.S. Government," or the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service.



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