

Illinois Grazing Manual Fact Sheet
SPECIES • POISONOUS PLANTS



Buttercups (*Wooded*)



Hooked Buttercup
Photo by: Elaine Haug
Hosted by the USDA-NRCS
PLANTS Database

Plants of wooded and old woodland pastures.

Description: Hooked Buttercup

Ranunculus recurvatus Poir.: Hooked buttercup is an erect herb from 8 to 28 inches tall, with sparsely hairy, little-branched stems. The leaves are all stalked except the uppermost and are broadly kidney-shaped or round. They are usually 3-cleft to below the middle and are more or less clothed with hairs. The flowers have pale-yellow oblong petals approximately ¼ inch long that are about the same size as the sepals. The seeds have a firm hooked or coiled beak.

Occurrence: Hooked buttercup is a plant of moist or dry woods. It ranges from Quebec and Main to northern Minnesota, south to Oklahoma, Georgia, and Mississippi.



Small-Flowered Crowfoot
Photo by: Lawrence S. Gilliam
Hosted by the USDA-NRCS
PLANTS Database

Description: Small-Flowered Crowfoot

Ranunculus abortivus L.: Small-flowered crowfoot is an erect plant from 4 to 20 inches tall, with smooth or slightly hairy stems that are branched above. The basal leaves are kidney-shaped to round, more or less heart-shaped at the bases, and round-toothed on the margins, although 1 or more of these leaves may be variously divided. The stem leaves are without stalks, or on very short stalks, and are deeply 3-parted to 5-parted. The segments are broadly linear and without teeth, or oblanceolate or obovate and irregularly toothed. The flowers are quite small. The yellow diamond-shaped petals are less than 1/8-inch-long and are shorter than the green sepals. The numerous seeds form small, globose heads on the summit of the flower stalks when the flowers wither.

Occurrence: Small-flowered crowfoot is a plant of moist or dry woods, and ranges from Labrador to Alaska, south to Colorado, Florida and Texas.



Swamp buttercup Photo
Source: Wikipedia

Description: Swamp Buttercup

Ranunculus septentrionalis Poir.: Swamp buttercup is an erect or ascending plant when the first flower appears, but the stems then elongate, recurve to the ground, and root at the nodes. The basal leaves and principal stem leaves are similar. The blades are at least as broad as they are long, and are 3-parted, with the terminal segment stalked and the lateral segments either stalked or almost stalkless. The margins of the segments are variously toothed. The flowers have yellow obovate petals from 3/8 to 5/8 inches long.

Occurrence: Swamp buttercup is a plant of wet places in meadows, woods, low alluvial ground along streams, and in ravines and valleys. It ranges from Labrador to western Ontario, south to Virginia, Kentucky, Arkansas and Texas.

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 from increasing and may eventually destroy them.

Toxic Principle

All known species of buttercups are more or less poisonous. Cursed crowfoot 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.



Clinical Signs

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 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.

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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