

YELLOW SWEETCLOVER

Melilotus officinalis



ORIGIN AND DESCRIPTION

Introduced from Eurasia and found in all states. Biennial, cool season, legume. First season growth forms one leafy-branched central stem. Fleshy roots, with buds on slightly sunken crowns. Second years growth forms well branched stems 2 to 6' tall. Leaves trifoliate with dentate margins. Inflorescence includes numerous elongated, loose racemes with small, pea-like yellow flowers bearing, small one-seeded pods which mature and shatter early. Nitrogen fixing.

GROWTH HABITS AND ENVIRONMENTAL PREFERENCES

Tolerant of all soil textures and varying from saline/alkaline to weakly acidic, pH of 5.5 soils.

Thrives in regions over 14" ppt. May be found in much drier areas under certain conditions. Vigorous invader naturalizing in road cuts or borrow pits. Weakly shade-tolerant, good drought resistance. Tolerates some flooding. Some fire tolerance when dormant.

CULTURE

Culture very similar to alfalfa. Use scarified seed. Plant 3 to 6 lbs. PLS per acre for full stands in semi-arid zones and up to double the amount of seed in more sub-humid zones. Plant only 1/2 to 2 lbs. per acre on rangeland mixtures in order to minimize bloat hazard. Be sure to inoculate seed. Plant seeds 1/2 to 1" deep but can go a little deeper on lighter and drier soils. Plant in late fall to early spring in plains and foothills. Seeds germinate with in 7 to 10 days except hard seed.

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Palatable to livestock and big game in vegetative stages and well used by small mammals and birds. Contains coumarin, which causes a bleeding disease in livestock. Widely used for temporary pasture, hay and silage. Provides quick cover on disturbed lands. Graze conservatively the first year to allow carbohydrate storage in roots. Graze leaving 8 to 10" growth the 2nd year. Graze rather heavily during growth period to keep from becoming stemmy and unpalatable.

IMPROVED VARIETIES

- 'Madrid' released from Spain.
- 'Goldtop' developed in Wisconsin.
- 'Yukon' released from Canada.

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