

Black Medic *Medicago lupulina*



Black medic, *Medicago lupulina*, is a European import. It is a member of the *Fabaceae* (pea, bean or legume) family, so it is not surprising that it is clover-like in appearance and is sometimes called Japanese clover, black clover, hop clover or trefoil. *Medicago* is derived from the Greek word *medice*, alfalfa, which is a member of the same family. The Latin word *lupulina* means hop-like, referring to the flower heads.

This low, trailing annual or short-lived perennial reproduces from seed and is a problem in lawns. It is also found in gardens, along roadsides, waste areas, stream valleys, pastures, and fields, commonly on poor soils.

Black medic stems are prostrate, 4-angled and branch from the base. They radiate out from a shallow taproot and grow 1-2 feet in length. The leaves are compound with three oval-shaped leaflets. These leaflets are finely toothed and have prominent veins. The central leaflet is borne on a short stalk above the other two leaflets that are found close to the stem. The 1/8 to 1/6 inch long bright yellow flowers are clustered on short stems that emerge from the leaf axils. Each cluster is approximately 1/2-inch long, round, and comprised of 10 to 50 individual flowers blooming from April to October. The flowers produce small black seed pods that are kidney-shaped, thick-walled and curved. The pods are hairy and contain only one gold or brown seed. The seeds can remain in the soil for years before germinating.



Black medic looks like yellow woodsorrel and white clover. It is easy to tell the difference between these plants when they are in bloom, but it is more difficult when they are not in bloom. Black medic is the easiest to identify because the center leaf is longer than the two lateral leaves. Yellow woodsorrel leaves are heart-shaped and sometimes folded along the midvein. White clover leaves often have a lighter green to white splotch in the middle and the leaves are toothed along the margins. When seedpods are present black medic is again easy to identify, because they are green on the stem and when the seeds dry out they turn black. Yellow woodsorrel seedpods are long, slender in shape and pointed, with five sides. White clover seedpods are found only when the flower dries out because this is when the fruiting pod develops. Another plant that looks like black medic in appearance is California burclover (*Medicago hispidula*), but it has spiny seed pods.



Yellow woodsorrel



White clover

Control options for black medic include cultivation by either rototilling or hoeing. Digging is also an option, but it can bring the ungerminated seeds to the surface to germinate. As you can imagine, these mechanical control options would be difficult in a lawn/turf area situation. A better option in lawns is hand pulling.

Chemical control options include glyphosate (Roundup®, Kleenup®) for spot treatments in bare ground and landscape areas. 2,4-D + MCPP + dicamba can be used in lawn/turf areas. Because of the dicamba in this combination, caution should be observed when using around flowers, tree and shrub roots.

Resources:

PNW Weed Management Handbook

Hortsense—<http://pep.wsu.edu/hortsense>

Weeds of the West; 9th Edition, 2000

University of Florida http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/BODY_FW026

University of Illinois

<http://weeds.cropsci.uiuc.edu/images/Black%20medic/pages/black%20medic%20closeup1.htm>

Kansas State University <http://www.lib.ksu.edu/wildflower/blackmedic.html>