

## CLOVER

### *Trifolium species*



*Trifolium campestre*

When you think or hear of St. Patrick's Day what is the first thing that you think of? A green clover! Some people consider clovers a lawn weed while other people do not mind them in their lawn. In lawns, clover can form dense patches that crowd out the desirable grasses. Clover can be cultivated for hay and provide excellent feed for livestock, but many of the introduced clovers can be very aggressive.

Clover is a member of the *Fabaceae* or pea family. Like all legumes, clovers have nitrogen-fixing ability. For this reason some people encourage clover in their lawns and it can be found in grass seed mixes. Typically, as a member of the legume family, it likes phosphate, potash and sulfur fertilizers. Clover is also a good indication of soils that are low in nitrogen.

Clovers are typically low-growing, herbaceous plants that can be either annual or perennial, depending on the species. They have leaves that are divided into three leaflets, also called trifoliate leaves. This is where the generic name *Trifolium* comes from. These leaflets are attached to the petiole at or near the same point. The blossoms or flowers are ball-like clusters growing on leafless stems. Depending on the species, the blossoms can be yellow, red, white or pink. Bees do like these blossoms. Clover does not hold up well under traffic



*Trifolium pratense*

Black medic and oxalis are sometimes confused with clover. Black medic does not have the leaflets at or near the same point on the petiole. Oxalis leaves are more heart shaped.



*Trifolium dubium*

There are several varieties of clover that can be found in lawns, fields, meadows and other sites with well-drained soils. Hop clover, *Trifolium campestre*, is an annual with yellow blossoms. Red clover, *Trifolium pratense*, is a cool-season perennial that has reddish blossoms. It is also used for hay. White clover, *Trifolium repens*, is a cool season perennial with white blossoms. Small hop clover, *Trifolium dubium*, sometimes called Japanese clover and sub-clover, *Trifolium subterraneum*, are also found in the lawn.

A good turf fertilizer program will help the lawn out-compete clover and make it harder for the clover to become established. Clover produces its own nitrogen and does not like a nitrogen-rich environment. It is not recommended to hand weed clover from the lawn as the stolons can break and sprout, increasing the infestation.

You are probably wondering why you are reading an article about clover in the fall instead of the spring. Most clovers are actively growing in the fall. This is an opportune time for chemical control of clover in a lawn. In landscape areas glufosinate (Finale®) or glyphosate (Roundup®) can be used. In turf areas 2, 4-D + MCPP + dicamba (Triplet ®), MCPP, and triclopyr (Turflon Ester®) can be used. In bare ground areas glyphosate and triclopyr can be used. Triclopyr can only be applied by a licensed applicator and glyphosate is for spot treatments only, as it also kills turfgrass. Remember to read the label and apply chemicals according to label directions.



*Trifolium subterraneum*

#### RESOURCES:

Hortsense <http://pep.wsu.edu/horsense>

Northwest Weeds-The Ugly and Beautiful Villains of Fields, Gardens, and Roadsides  
by Ronald J. Taylor

WSU publication EB0607: Lawn Weed Control for Washington State Homeowners