USDA NRCS
United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Plant Fact Sheet

RED CLOVER

Trifolium pratense L.

Plant Symbol = TRPR2

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program

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Uses
Red clover is primarily used for hay, pasture, silage, and soil improvement. It is a quick growing crop, easily established, and produces high quality forage. Tolerance of shade allows red clover to be used effectively as a cover crop under silage corn.

Status
Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Description
Trifolium pratense L., red clover, is an introduced biennial or short-lived perennial that grows as one of two types: medium (double-cut) or mammoth (single-cut). Red clover plants grow from crowns. Plants have hollow, hairy stems and branches. Stem lengths of medium and mammoth types average 18 inches and 24 to 30 inches, respectively. Medium types have about 4 branches per stem; mammoth have 6. Each leaf consists of a slender stalk bearing 3 leaflets. The taproot of red clover is extensively branched. Flowers are borne in compact clusters or heads and are usually rose-pink in color. Seed pods are small, short, and contain kidney-shaped seeds that vary in color from yellow to deep violet. Mammoth red clover matures later than medium types; only one crop of mammoth red clover is harvested each season since recovery is slow.

Adaptation and Distribution
Red clover grows best on well-drained loamy soils, but it will also grow on soil that is not as well-drained. Medium and fine textured soils are preferred by the plant over sandy or gravelly soils. It is best adapted to a pH of 6.0 or higher.

Red clover is distributed throughout the United States. For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

Establishment
Red clover may be seeded in pure stands, but it is often mixed with grain or grass. Spring or late summer seedings are satisfactory. It may be overseeded in the spring on fall seeded grasses. Red clover seed should be inoculated. Phosphorus and potash are the fertilizer elements needed mostly by red clover. Apply as recommended by soil tests. Seeding may be done with a drill or broadcast. A firm, weed-free seedbed is essential. Plant seeds ¼ to ½ inch deep.

Management
Graze or cut for hay when the red clover is ¼ to ½ in bloom. A second cutting or successive grazings should occur when red clover is ¼ in bloom. Leave at least 2 inches of growth after each harvest. Care should be taken to eliminate or appreciably reduce bloating of livestock. Keep lime and fertilizers (phosphorus and potash) at the proper level. Control insects and diseases.

Pests and Potential Problems
Anthracnose and powdery mildew may be problems in areas with high humidity and rainfall. Choose resistant cultivars to reduce the occurrence of these diseases.

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)
Some of the major cultivars for the western US are 'Pennscott', 'Chesapeake', 'Kenland', 'Cumberland', 'Dollard', 'Midland' and 'Lakeland'. 'Altaswede', 'Norlac', and 'Craig' are mammoth red clovers. In the eastern US, varieties selected should be resistant

to anthracnose and powdery mildew. Some cultivars commercially available that are moderate to highly resistant to anthracnose are 'Acclaim', 'Rally', 'Redland II', and 'Renegade'. Those moderate to highly resistant to powdery mildew are 'Arlington', 'Rally', 'Rebel', 'Red Star', and 'Reddy'. Most cultivars and varieties adapted to your area can be found through local seed suppliers.

Prepared By & Species Coordinator:
USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site<http://plants.usda.gov> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>