

CANADIAN MILKVETCH

Astragalus canadensis L.
Plant Symbol = ASC11

Contributed By: USDA NRCS National Plant Data Center



© William S. Justice
Botany Department, Smithsonian Institution
@ PLANTS

Alternate Names

Canada milk-vetch, Canada milkvetch

Uses

Ethnobotanic: The Blackfoot, who dug them in the spring for eating (Kindscher 1987), gathered Canadian milkvetch roots. Canadian milkvetch was often used in a broth (Moerman 1998).

Medical: The root is analgesic and antihemorrhagic and can be chewed or used as a tea to treat chest and back pains, coughs and spitting up of blood (Moerman 1998). A poultice made from the chewed root has also been used to treat cuts (Ibid.).

Status

Please consult the Plants Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status, such as, state noxious status and wetland indicator values.

Description

General: Bean family (Fabaceae). Canadian milkvetch (*Astragalus canadensis*) is a smooth, stout-stemmed plant that grows up to five feet tall (Ladd 1995). The leaves are smooth; elliptic to oblong, with thirteen to thirty-one stalked leaflets that are one to two inches long. The flowers are greenish white to

cream colored, with a regular pea flower shape, located at the ends of long stalks. The fruit is a smooth, erect, stout, woody pod, twelve to fifteen millimeters long and divided into two cells (Vance, Jowsey, & McLean 1984).

Distribution: *Astragalus canadensis* ranges from Quebec and Vermont to Hudson Bay and British Columbia, south to Virginia, West Virginia, Arkansas, Texas and Colorado (Steyermark 1963). For current distribution, please consult the Plant profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Adaptation

Canadian milkvetch is commonly found in dry prairies, moist shores, riverbanks, marshy grounds and open or partly shaded ground (Voss 1985). This species requires a well-drained soil in a sunny position. It has low tolerance of root disturbance and cannot tolerate extremely cold weather.

Establishment

Propagation by Seed: Canadian milkvetch seeds should be sown in a cold frame as soon as they are ripe. Seeds should be pre-soaked for twenty-four hours in hot water before sowing. Germination can be slow but is usually within four to nine weeks if the seeds are sown fresh. When they are large enough to handle, place the seedlings into individual pots and grow plant them in the greenhouse for their first winter. Plant them into their permanent positions in spring or early summer.

Management

Canadian milkvetch looks similar to some closely related poisonous locoweeds, so its use is not recommended unless positive identification can be made (Kindscher 1987). Many members of this genus contain a poison that affects cattle (Fielder 1975). They become affected with a sort of insanity, a slow poisoning that can cause death within a period of months or even a year or two (Ibid).

Cultivars, Improved and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

Materials are somewhat available from native plant seed vendors. Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service) office for more information. Look in the phone book under "United States Government". The Natural Resources Conservation Service will be

listed under the subheading "Department of Agriculture."

References

- Braun, L.E. 1967. *The monocotyledoneae from cat-tails to orchids*. The Ohio State University Press, Columbus, Ohio.
- Britton, N.L. & A. Brown 1970. *An illustrated flora of the northern United States and Canada*. Dover Publications, New York, New York.
- Bruggen, T. V. 1976. *The vascular plants of South Dakota*. The Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa.
- Fielder, M. 1975. *Plant medicine and folklore*. Winchester Press, New York, New York.
- Gleason, H. A. & A. Cronquist 1993. *Manual of vascular plants of northeastern United States and adjacent Canada*. 2nd ed. The New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, New York.
- Kindscher, K. 1987. *An ethnobotanical guide: edible wild plants of the prairie*. University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.
- Moerman, D. 1998. *Native American ethnobotany*. Timber Press, Portland, Oregon.
- Radford, A.E., H.E. Ahles, & C.R. Bell 1968. *Manual of the vascular flora of the Carolinas*. The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.
- Straughbaugh, P. D. & E. L. Core 1977. *Flora of West Virginia*. 2nd ed. Seneca Books, Inc., Morgantown, West Virginia.
- The Great Plains Flora Association 1986. *Flora of the Great Plains*. University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.
- Tiner, R.W. Jr. 1987. *A field guide to coastal wetland plants of the northeastern United States*. The University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, Massachusetts.
- Voss, E.G. 1972. *Michigan flora*. Cranbrook Institute of Science, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, & University of Michigan Herbarium.

Prepared By

Lincoln M. Moore

USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Species Coordinator

Lincoln M. Moore

USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Edited: 05apr02 ahv; 25feb03 ahv; 31may06jsp

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>>

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's [TARGET Center](#) at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Read about [Civil Rights at the Natural Resources Conservation Service](#).