

Creeping Buttercup

Ranunculus repens

Buttercup Family

Weed of Concern: Control Recommended

Identification Tips

- Low-growing perennial with creeping stolons (horizontal stems)
- Dark green leaves with pale patches divided into three toothed leaflets
- Somewhat hairy leaves and stems
- Can grow to one foot tall but often shorter in mowed areas
- Flowers are bright yellow and usually have 5, but up to 10, glossy petals

Biology

- Reproduces by seed and vegetatively by long, branching stolons that root at the nodes
- Stolon growth begins in spring and peaks in late summer
- Usually flowers from March to August with seed production about two weeks after flowering
- Each plant produces 20 to 150 seeds which may remain viable in the soil for 20 years and up to 80 if not disturbed
- New plants may persist over winter as small rosettes
- Prefers moist conditions

Impacts

- Fresh plants are toxic to grazing animals
- Extremely aggressive growth; one plant can spread over a 40 square foot area in one year
- Depletes potassium in the soil which has a detrimental effect on surrounding plants
- Invades wet, grassy areas, outcompeting native plants
- Aggressive in crop fields and ornamental landscapes

Distribution

- Found in pastures, farmlands, natural wetlands as well as city gardens, lawns and along woodland trails
- Grows especially well in wet, poorly drained areas and is tolerant of compacted soils and grazing



Originally from Europe, creeping buttercup is now found throughout North America from farms to city gardens and lawns to wetlands.



Buttercup is toxic to grazing livestock and should be removed from pastures.

Questions?

King County Noxious Weed Control
Program Line: 206-296-0290
www.kingcounty.gov/weeds

What You Can Do

While there is no legal requirement for controlling creeping buttercup in King County, the King County Noxious Weed Control Board recognizes this plant as a weed of concern and recommends prevention of spread into uninfested areas and control in natural areas and pastures where feasible.

Control Methods

In areas where creeping buttercup is established and widespread, removal is generally only recommended as part of a larger effort to restore pastures or other landscapes. For uninfested areas, remove encroaching plants as soon as possible to avoid future problems.

Prevention and Cultural Practices: Avoid spreading buttercup seeds by cleaning mowers and other equipment. Reduce compaction and improve drainage by aerating and keeping traffic off when soil is wet. In lawns and pastures, overseed and fertilize to promote healthy grass. Adding lime can improve grass health and keep buttercup from re-establishing. However, lime won't control buttercup that is already well-established.

Manual: Dig out with a sharp trowel removing all the runners and roots. This is most effective from fall to spring when soil is moist and roots are less apt to break. Re-seed or re-plant bare areas after removing buttercup to keep it from re-infesting the area. Pull up any new seedlings before they establish runners.

Mechanical: Known to quickly re-sprout when cut so mowing is not recommended. Regular cultivation such as tilling can kill buttercup but plants may grow back from root and other plant fragments; long-lived seeds may germinate and re-infest the area once cultivation ceases.

Chemical: Systemic (translocated) herbicides can be effective on creeping buttercup, especially if combined with monitoring for surviving plants. **Choose a formulation that is appropriate for the site: either aquatic or terrestrial. Follow the label exactly as written and only use at the rate that is prescribed on the label.** Herbicides can be painted or brushed on leaves to avoid drift onto desirable plants. Repeat on regrowth as needed.

It will take at least two or three applications to eradicate the buttercup. Monitor area for re-growth. Products containing glyphosate (e.g. Roundup, Aquamaster) are effective when applied in the summer and fall before the leaves die back. However, glyphosate is "non-selective" and will injure any foliage that it comes in contact with including grass. Selective broadleaf herbicides with the active ingredient MCPA work well for lawn and field areas as they won't harm most grasses. Metsulfuron (Ally) is effective on buttercup but is hard on some grasses. Any questions, please contact the Noxious Weed Control Program.

Also Wanted: Tall Buttercup



Tall buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*) has bright yellow flowers similar to creeping buttercup, but it does not have creeping stolons. When mature, it stands approximately three feet tall with many branched, upright stems. Additionally, the leaves have more deeply cut margins than the creeping variety. However, they do share the same invasive nature and toxicity to grazing livestock so removal is also recommended wherever possible. Tall buttercup can be controlled with hand-pulling or the same herbicides as creeping buttercup.

