

CANADIAN MILKVETCH

Astragalus canadensis L.

Plant Symbol = ASCA11

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Materials Center



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Uses

Erosion control, forage quality, wetland restoration/enhancement, and wildlife habitat benefits.

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

Canadian milkvetch (*Astragalus canadensis*) is a perennial legume with underground rhizomes. Plants of this species may be large and robust once established, with plant height ranging from 12 to 40 inches. The leaves are odd-pinnately compound; leaflets are medium green, 1 to 4 cm long, and 5 to 15 mm wide. Generally, they are smooth or slightly hairy on the upper surface with stiff, short hairs on the underside.

The flowers are creamy, greenish white and about 1/2 to 3/4 inch long in a dense spike-like head.

Flowering occurs from May to August. The pods contain several seeds that are small, smooth, and brownish yellow-green.

Adaptation and Distribution

Canadian milkvetch is a native legume that is widely distributed across all but the extreme southeastern and southwestern United States. It is found naturally in moist prairies, open woodlands, roadsides, thickets, and streambanks. Plants tend to colonize in these areas.

For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

Establishment

Site: Canadian milkvetch prefers moist sites. It is adapted to a wide range of soil types and conditions. However, it is NOT recommended for dry uplands.

Rate of Seeding: Planting Canadian milkvetch as part of a native grass/forb mix (preferably as a sculptured seeding on an adapted site) is recommended. The number of seeds/lb varies, but averages 266,000 to 275,000 seeds/lb. Planting 1/10 to 1/4 PLS lb/ac as part of a mix should produce adequate densities. When higher densities are desired, such as along streambank corridors, 1 to 2 PLS lb/ac is recommended.

Date of Seeding: Spring seeding should be done prior to May 15; dormant seeding after October 20. Seed should be mechanically scarified to break down dormancy due to hard seed coat. It is also desirable to inoculate seed with species-specific rhizobium for nitrogen fixing. Plant seed shallow at a depth of 1/2 to 3/4 inches into a firm seedbed. The preferred planting method is to use the legume box of a grass seed drill for the Canadian milkvetch seed. Low rates of seed may need to be mixed with filler material for better seed distribution. The second method of choice is to mix the Canadian milkvetch seed with the other native species in one of the other seed boxes. If seed settles to the bottom of the box, it should be added in frequent intervals rather than all at once. If conditions do not permit the use of a drill, double the seeding rate, broadcast the seed, and cover lightly by harrowing.

Management

Longevity of Canadian milkvetch is short, generally 3 to 4 years. Persistence may be enhanced by mowing or grazing to prevent seed formation. Plants may also be improved by phosphorous or potassium fertilizer. The plant is palatable to livestock and deer and is highly nutritious at certain times of the growing season.

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

'Sunrise' was released in 1997 by Dr. Arvid Boe from South Dakota State University and the South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station. It was exclusively released to Norfarm Seeds, Inc. in Roseau, Minnesota.

Prepared By & Species Coordinator:

Nancy Jensen, Agronomist
Bismarck Plant Materials Center
Bismarck, North Dakota

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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>>

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