

CANADIAN MILKVETCH

Astragalus canadensis L.
Plant Symbol = ASC11

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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."

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Edited: 05apr02 ahv; 25feb03 ahv; 31may06jss

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