Creeping Buttercup

Ranunculus repens **Buttercup Family**

Weed of Concern:
Control Recommended

Identification Tips

- Low-growing perennial with creeping stolons (horizontal stems)
- Leaves dark green with pale patches, divided into 3 toothed leaflets
- Leaves and stems somewhat hairy
- Reaches up to one foot tall, but often shorter in mowed areas
- Flowers bright yellow, usually 5 (up to 10) glossy petals

Biology

Reproduces by seed and vegetatively via long branching stolons that root at nodes. Stolon growth starts in spring, peaks in late summer. Usually flowers March-August, producing seeds about 2 weeks after flowering. Each plant produces 20-150 seeds, which may remain viable in soil for 20 years and up to 80 years 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 soil, which has a detrimental effect on surrounding plants. Invades wet, grassy areas, outcompeting native plants. Aggressive in crop fields, ornamental landscapes, and pastures.

Distribution

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

What You Can Do

While there is no legal requirement to control creeping buttercup, the King County Noxious Weed Control Board recognizes this plant as a weed of concern. The Board 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 area when soil is wet. In lawns and pastures, overseed and fertilize to promote healthy grass. Adding lime can improve grass

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

Flowers are bright yellow and usually have 5 petals.

Leaves are divided into 3 toothed leaflets with pale patches. Leaves and stems are both somewhat hairy.

Questions?
King County Noxious Weed Control Program: **206-477-WEED** **kingcounty.gov/weeds**

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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 runners and roots. Most effective fall-spring when soil is moist and roots are less apt to break. After removing buttercup, reseed or replant areas to keep it from reinfesting the area. Pull up any new seedlings before they establish runners.

Mechanical:
Known to quickly resprout when cut, so mowing does not control it. 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 reinfest the area when cultivation ceases.

Chemical:
Systemic 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 use only at the prescribed rate.** Herbicides can be painted or brushed on leaves to avoid drift onto desirable plants. Repeat on regrowth as needed. Products containing glyphosate are effective when applied in summer and fall before leaves die back. However, glyphosate is "non-selective" and will injure any foliage that it comes in contact with, including grass. A selective broadleaf herbicide with the active ingredient MCPA works well for field areas as it won't harm most grasses. Aminopyralid is effective on buttercup and has no grazing or haying restrictions if used in pastures. But do not compost sprayed grass because aminopyralid remains active until it decomposes in soil. Metsulfuron is also effective but is hard on some grasses. A combination of triclopyr or dicamba and 2,4-D is more effective than 2,4-D alone, but not as effective as the other chemicals listed above. For more information, contact the Noxious Weed Control Program.

Plants can quickly form large patches, especially in wet, poorly drained soils.

When manually controlling creeping buttercup, be sure to remove all roots and runners.

Could be confused with:

Tall buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*), another invasive, looks like creeping buttercup but lacks creeping stolons.

Tall buttercup's bright yellow flowers look similar to those of creeping buttercup, but mature plants stand about 3 feet tall with many branched, upright stems. Also, the leaves have more deeply cut margins than the creeping variety. Both plants share the same invasive nature and toxicity to grazing livestock, so removal is recommended wherever possible. Tall buttercup can be controlled with hand-pulling or the same herbicides as used on creeping buttercup.

Tall buttercup grows higher than creeping buttercup.

Tall buttercup leaves have more deeply cut margins.

English
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206-477-WEED (206-477-9333) or TTY: 711
kingcounty.gov/weeds **noxious.weeds@kingcounty.gov**

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