

Target Invasive Species

Lesser Celandine *Ranunculus ficaria*



Description

Lesser celandine is an annual herbaceous plant that grows in early spring. It has glossy, dark green, rounded leaves arranged in a low-growing rosette with both fibrous and tuberously thickened roots. The leaves appear in late winter and die back by early June. Bright yellow buttercup-like flowers bloom in March and April, held above the leaves. Seeds mature by May, but reportedly are rarely formed. Vegetative

reproduction is by small underground tubers and by axillary bulblets formed on the stems. Both tubers and bulblets are readily dispersed during flooding events.

Habitat

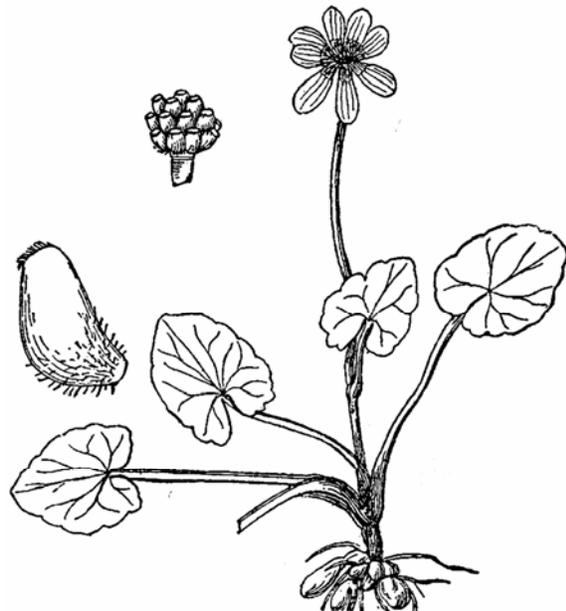
Lesser celandine is characteristic of moist alluvial soils in forested floodplains. It also invades grassy meadows, roadsides, lawns, and less frequently drier soils of embankments and open woodlands.

Threats

Lesser celandine is aggressive and spreads rapidly once established. Lesser celandine forms near monocultures of extensive acreage in the early spring. Because of its early emergence and aggressive nature, lesser celandine poses a serious threat to indigenous spring ephemerals. It has significantly altered the structure of natural plant communities.

Control

Small infestations can be dug up, taking care to remove all the tubers and bulblets, but for larger populations, digging may create too



much soil disturbance. Herbicides can be used as soon as the leaves appear, but before when indigenous plants begin to grow. Herbicides should be used very cautiously to avoid harming indigenous plant and amphibian populations.

Suggested Alternative Plants

Many lovely perennial spring-flowering plants are available as non-invasive alternatives to lesser celandine. Some examples native to the eastern U.S. are wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*), Dutchman's breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*), squirrel-corn (*Decentra Canadensis*), cutleaf toothwort (*Cardamine concatenata*), twinleaf (*Jeffersonia diphylla*), and bloodroot (*Sanguinaria Canadensis*). For a list of additional native shrubs, visit www.bbg.org/nativealternatives.

Sources: An Overview of Nonindigenous Plant Species in New Jersey, New Jersey Dept of Environmental Protection Natural and Historic Resources Group, Parks and Forestry. www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/natural/invasivereport.pdf.
Weeds Gone Wild: Alien Plant Invaders of Natural Areas, Plant Conservation Alliance's Plant Working Group. www.nps.gov/plants/alien/.
Photograph courtesy of Leslie J. Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut, United States, <http://www.invasive.org>.
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