



BWSR Featured Plant

Name: Canada Milkvetch (*Astragalus canadensis*)

Plant Family: Legume



Long-tongued pollinators are attracted to the tubular

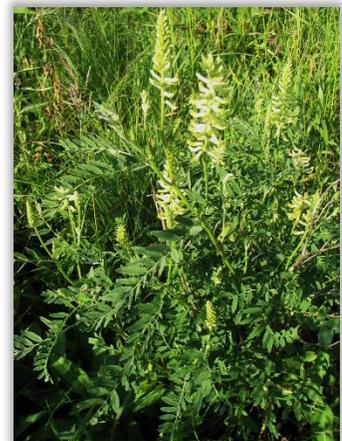
Canada Milkvetch is a plant of many uses. It has dense, spike-like clusters of flowers that bloom with creamy white or yellowish flowers during the summer. Having a taproot and fibrous roots it is effective at controlling erosion, and adding nitrogen to the soil. It attracts many different types of pollinators and its leaves are eaten by a variety of grazers. It is a versatile plant for lakeshores, detention pond slopes and a variety of other conservation plantings.

Identification

Canada Milkvetch is a perennial legume, native to Minnesota. The stems are smooth and stout, and the total height can range from 12 to 40 inches. Its roots are spreading rhizomes. The leaves are pinnately compound, meaning that one leaf is comprised of many leaflets. The leaflets are usually a dark green color, elliptic or oblong in shape and one to four centimeters long. The surface of the leaflets is smooth or slightly hairy on the top and hairy with stiff short hairs on the bottom surface. The flowers have five petals and are tubular, like most plants in the pea family. They can be a creamy white or yellowish color. Flowers form on dense spike-like heads. There are usually many flower spikes per plant. Canada Milkvetch blooms through mid to late summer. Seed pods contain several seeds that are smooth and brown or yellow.

Statewide Wetland
Indicator Status:

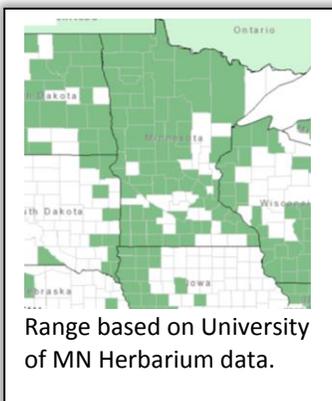
- Facultative (FAC)



Individual plants grow up to 40 inches tall



Leaves are made up of slightly hairy leaflets.



Range

The species is widely distributed across the United States. The only part of the country where it is not found is parts of the southeast and southwest. In Minnesota it can be found across the state. It is most common in western and northwestern Minnesota. Canada Milkvetch prefers moist soils and is found in moist prairies, savannas, woodlands, roadsides, and streambanks.

Uses

Canada Milkvetch is used for erosion control, conservation grazing, and the enhancement of nutrient poor soils through its ability to fix nitrogen through a symbiotic relationship with *Rhizobium* bacteria that attach to the roots. It is well suited to reclamation projects, side slopes of detention ponds, shorelines and mesic prairies plantings. It provides wildlife habitat as a rich nectar source for hummingbirds and pollinators with long tongues such as bumblebees, honeybees, and leaf cutting bees. Several mammals graze on its nutritious leaves including deer, rabbits and livestock, and its seeds are eaten by upland game birds and rodents. Native Americans used the roots as a food source and a remedy for back pain, and coughs.

Primary Uses:

- Pollinator Habitat
- Conservation Grazing
- Soil Stabilization
- Soil Enhancement

Planting Recommendations

Planting Methods

- Seed
- Containerized Plants
- Bare root

The best planting methods for Canada Milkvetch are by seeds, containerized plants and bare roots. Canada Milkvetch is best suited for sites with moist soils and full sun or partial shade. The seeds have a natural hard seed coat that requires scarification (rubbing with sandpaper)

and stratification (simulating winter conditions to break dormancy) when spring seeding is planned. These treatments are not needed when seeding in late fall, because winter conditions will break dormancy. Since the species is a legume it is best to inoculate the seeds with species-specific *Rhizobium* inoculum for fixing nitrogen. Seeds should be lightly covered in soils after seeding to protect the inoculum.



Canada Milkvetch can be found in mesic prairies

Similar Species



Chickpea Milk Vetch (Astragalus cicer) is a non-native and potentially invasive species, and one of several other Astragalus species in Minnesota. It has a slightly shorter flower spike (3/4"-2 1/2" and tends to have a sprawling growth form.

Photo by Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers



Wild Licorice (Glycyrrhiza lepidota) looks similar to Canada Milk Vetch but the leaflets taper to a blunt tip and lack hairs.

Photo by Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers

References

Minnesota Wildflowers <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/flower/canada-milkvetch>

USDA Plants Database: <http://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=ASCA11>