

# BWSR Featured Plant

**Name: Partridge pea (*Chamaecrista fasciculata*)**

**Plant family: Senna (Caesalpinaceae)**

*Partridge pea flowers July through September in Minnesota, providing food for pollinators. Blooms grow along the stem and between the leaves. The plant is also known as "sensitive pea" because when touched, the leaflets collapse into each other. **Photo Credit:** Fritz Flohr Reynolds*



Partridge pea, AKA sleeping plant, is a brightly colored annual with fine-textured leaves that's native to Minnesota. The plant is often called

"sleeping plant" or "sensitive pea" because the leaflets collapse into each other when touched. In

Minnesota, partridge pea blooms July through September. Flowers provide a food source for a variety of pollinators; seed pods attract birds, including quail and northern bobwhite. An early pioneer species, partridge pea can establish itself on disturbed, sandy soil. It makes a good cover crop for restoration and erosion control.

### Plant Stats

**STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS:** FACU

**PRIMARY USES:** Pollinator nutrition, food for wildlife

## Uses

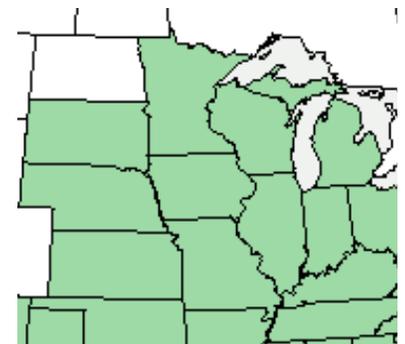
The plant contains a cathartic substance toxic to humans and livestock when consumed, but highly nutritious for animals such as mice, deer and birds. When partridge pea grows in large masses, it provides cover for birds. A host plant for several butterfly species, it provides pollen for bees, insects and birds.



*Flowers' 10 slender, maroon stamens contrast with the five bright yellow petals. **Photo Credit:** Laura Lukens*

## Range

In Minnesota, it's found in several areas throughout the southern part of the state. Neither endangered nor threatened in the U.S., the species grows in parts of the Midwest and East. Its favored habitats include open woods, disturbed soil, prairies, bluffs and riverbanks.



**Range map source:** The range map is based on the USDA Plants Database.

## Planting Recommendations

Partridge pea grows well on clay, loam, clay-loam, sandy loam and sandy soil. Planting sites should be well-drained with full or part sun. Seeds should be planted in late winter or early spring. Scarification before planting initiates germination. Seeds should be inoculated with compatible rhizobium and

planted a quarter-inch to three-quarters of an inch deep. An annual species, partridge pea generally persists most effectively in sandy soils where there is a lack of competition and it can re-establish from seed. The species generally disappears in plantings dominated by tall, warm-season grasses.

## Identification



*Partridge pea grows 1 to 3 feet tall. Alternate, compound leaves produce five to 18 pairs of opposite leaflets. In Minnesota, the plant is found primarily in the south. It prefers open woods, disturbed soil, prairies, bluffs and riverbanks. Photo Credit: Thomas G. Barnes*

Flowers of the partridge pea grow along the stem and between the leaves. Each flower has five yellow petals, measuring about 1 inch in diameter. The upper four petals have red splotches at the base; the lower petal is typically slightly larger and hangs below. Each flower contains 10 long, slender deep maroon stamens. Small compound leaves alternate along the stem, producing five to 18 pairs of opposite leaflets. Tiny hairs along leaf edges can sense disturbance and trigger movement in the leaves. The fruits are slender, flat and shaped like pea pods. Green with fine hairs, the pods turn dark brown as they mature. Partridge pea grows about 1 to 3 feet tall with a 12- to 18-inch spread.



*Scotch broom, an invasive species not yet found in Minnesota, is similar to partridge pea but produces hundreds of flowers and less leafy foliage. It has been found in the eastern and western United States.*

**Photo Credits:**  
David Stang, top;  
Brylie Oxley, left

## Similar Species

Scotch broom is an invasive plant found in the eastern and western United States. It has not yet reached Minnesota. Scotch broom has pods and flowers of a similar size and color, but produces less leafy foliage and hundreds of flowers — which bloom earlier in the season.

## References

Minnesota Wildflowers: <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/flower/partridge-pea>  
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center: [https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id\\_plant=chfa2](https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=chfa2)  
USDA Plants Database: <https://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=chfa2>

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