FULL ACCOUNT FOR: *Lotus corniculatus*

**System:** Terrestrial

<table>
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<th>Kingdom</th>
<th>Phylum</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Order</th>
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<tr>
<td>Plantae</td>
<td>Magnoliophyta</td>
<td>Magnoliopsida</td>
<td>Fabales</td>
<td>Fabaceae</td>
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</table>

**Common name**
- hop 'o my thumb (English), paprastasis garzdenis (English, Lithuania), komonica zwyrcjna (English, Poland), Hornklee (German), kurdglsprchkhila (English, Georgia), devil's-claw (English), cuernecillo (Spanish), bloomfell (English), ragaine vanagnadzini (English, Latvia), loto corniculato (English, Spain), keltamaite (English, Finland), palyavaya akatzyya (English, Belarus), kurdls prukhila (English, Georgia), harilik noiahammas (English, Estonia), cuernecillo del campo (Spanish), lyadvenetz zhigulevski (English, Russian Federation), lyadvenetz somnitelnyi (English, Russian Federation), lyadvenetz krymski (English, Russian Federation), lyadvenetz olgi (English, Russian Federation), lyadvenetz komarova (English, Russian Federation), lyadvenetz baltiiski (English, Russian Federation), lyadvenetz kavkazski (English, Russian Federation), lyadvenetz ruprekhta (English, Russian Federation), lyadvenetz rogatyi (English, Russian Federation), lyadvenetz polevoi (English, Russian Federation), pied-de-poule (English, France), zayachchy bratki (English, Belarus), birdfoot deervetch (English), birdfoot trefoil (English), cornette (French), ginestrina (English, Italy), cube (French), garden birdfoot trefoil (English), Dutchman's clogs (English, England), crowtoes (English), garden bird's-foot-trefoil (English), cat's clover (English), rutvitza ragataya (English, Belarus), tryzouka (English, Belarus), yellow treefoil (English), bird's-foot trefoil (English), ground honeysuckle (English), sheep-foot (English), upright trefoil (English), common lotus (English), ghizdei marunt (English, Russian Federation), Gemeiner Hornklee (English, Germany), hen-and-chickens (English, England), devil's fingers (English, England), lady's slippers (English, England), granny's toenails (English, England), galgaz gurdotu (English, Azerbaijan), buinuztu Gurdotu (English, Azerbaijan), lady's fingers (English, England), ekhdzherarvuit (English, Armenia), ebert khoshoontzor (English, Mongolia), lotier corniculé (French), cornichão (English)
**Synonym**

- *Lotus corniculatus*, var. *arvensis* (Schkuhr) Ser. ex DC.
- *Lotus balticus*, Miniaev
- *Lotus carpetanus*, Lacaita
- *Lotus caucasicus*, Kuprian
- *Lotus corniculatus*, var. *glaber* Opiz
- *Lotus corniculatus*, subsp. major (Scop.) Gams
- *Lotus corniculatus*, var. major (Scop.) Brand
- *Lotus filicaulis*, Durieu
- *Lotus frondosus*, (Freyn) Kuprian
- *Lotus japonicus*, (Regel) K. Larson
- *Lotus komarovii*, Miniaev
- *Lotus major*, Scop.
- *Lotus olgae*, Klokov
- *Lotus peczoricus*, Miniaev and Ulle
- *Lotus ruprechtii*, Miniaev
- *Lotus ucrainicus*, Klokov
- *Lotus zhegulensis*, Klokov
- *Lotus ambiguus*, Spreng
- *Lotus ciliatus*, sensu Schur
- *Lotus corniculatus*, L. var. *kochii* Chrtkova

**Similar species**

- Coronilla varia, Trifolium, Medicago, Lotus pedunculatus

**Summary**

Lotus corniculatus (bird's foot trefoil) is a low growing perennial legume that has long been valued as an agricultural crop. Lotus corniculatus is native to much of Europe, Asia and parts of Africa, but now has a near global distribution. Over most of its range, Lotus corniculatus is not considered invasive, although in a few areas it has out-competed native vegetation.

[view this species on IUCN Red List]
Species Description

*Lotus corniculatus* is a perennial, herbaceous member of the pea family (Fabaceae). It can be distinguished from all other members of the pea family by its five leaflets and head-like umbels of bright yellow flowers. *L. corniculatus* blooms from May-September in the United States. The root system includes a long tap root, which may be longer than 3 feet, and a fibrous mat near the soil surface consisting of secondary roots, rhizomes, and modified stems (stolons). (OSU, undated). The stems of *L. corniculatus* are nearly square (USDA Forest Service, 2006), erect or sprawling on the ground, branched, either smooth or sparsely hairy, and up to one and a half feet long. (USGS-NRWRC, 2006). Numerous stems arise from a basal, well-developed crown with branches arising from leaf axils. (Frame, undated (a)) The leaves are alternate and pinnately compound. The leaflets are somewhat hairy, smooth, elliptic, rounded or pointed at the tip, and tapering to the base. They are up to 2/3 an inch long and 1/3 an inch wide, and lack stalks. The flowers are up to 2/3 an inch long, with ten stamens and superior ovaries. (USGS-NRWRC, 2006). "Ripe pods are cylindrical, 15-30mm long, 2-3mm wide, brown to almost black, borne at right angles to the top of the peduncle (hence 'bird's-foot' trefoil as the common name). Seeds are irregularly rounded, somewhat flattened, 1.3-1.5mm long, variable in colour at maturity, olive to brownish to almost black, frequently speckled and shiny." (Jones and Turkington, 1986). Seeds are ejected from the pods as the pods rupture at maturity (OSU, undated), averaging 375,000 seeds per pound. (Bush, 2002).

Notes

*Lotus corniculatus* seeds are one of the most common impurities of white clover seeds and some commercially available grasses. (OSU, undated). The Cornell University Poisonous Plants Information Database lists *L. corniculatus* as a potential poison. The primary poison contained in *L. corniculatus* is CN tannin, which affects cattle and sheep most often. (ASCU, 2003)

Lifecycle Stages

*Lotus corniculatus* sometimes behaves as a hemicryptophyte, dying back to a small crown of short shoots during the winter. In northern regions, it can also behave as a genophyte, losing all above ground parts during the winter. (Jones & Turkington, 1986). Unless cut, plants show one flush of growth per year above ground beginning in March/April and continuing until late June. (Jones & Turkington, 1986).
Uses
Strains of *L. corniculatus* selected after introduction from Europe are now of major importance as both a pasture and hay crop. (NewCROP, 1997). On well-drained soils with adequate moisture, *L. corniculatus* yields 4 tons of hay per acre. (Bush, 2002). *L. corniculatus* has a deep, branched root system that can tolerate both wet and moderately dry conditions, and is unusual among legumes in that it does not cause bloat in cattle. (NewCROP, 1997) "Birdsfoot trefoil is more tolerant of grazing than alfalfa and red clover, and will normally outlive red clover by several years." (UMass, 2006). Like many plants in the pea family, *L. corniculatus* is a nitrogen fixer and is thus utilized to enhance poor pastures. (OSU, undated). Bird's foot trefoil is commonly used along sides of roads for erosion prevention (Bush, 2002). Being a nitrogen fixer, *L. corniculatus* has the potential to maintain vegetative cover of sand dunes by adding nitrogen to the soil. (Ede, 1997). It also provides food for elk, deer, Canadian geese (Bush, 2002) sheep, voles, and rabbits. (Jones & Turkington, 1986). At shooting preserves and around ponds, it provides cover for pheasants and ducks. (Bush, 2002).

Habitat Description
*Lotus corniculatus* thrives in temperate regions, inhabiting roadsides, old fields, and other disturbed soils (USGS-NRWRC, 2006). In the British Isles, *L. corniculatus* is "widespread in grasslands and species-rich heath; also found on cliffs and as a pioneer in quarries and on roadside verges." (Jones and Turkington, 1986). It is "adapted to loam soils with good moisture holding capacity and also to heavy clay soils. It is not adapted to sandy soils. High soil temperatures appear to favour root diseases. Legume of choice where drainage or acidity are a problem. It will tolerate low levels of fertility but is productive only on soils with good fertility. Birdsfoot trefoil is a slow growing perennial legume adapted to cooler climates. It is slow to establish and being a light loving plant will not withstand much competition at the seedling stage." (UMass, 2006). It can tolerate a pH range of 5.5-7.5, and performs well on shallow or poorly drained soils compared to alfalfa. (Bush, 2002). A study in Australia showed that *L. corniculatus* has "important potential for low fertility acidic soils on tablelands and slopes where the Australian Annual Rainfall is 650-1000mm, especially in northern New South Wales." (Ayres, 2006). Although *L. corniculatus* prefers to grow in warm, moist places, it is intolerant of being inundated with water for prolonged periods. (Zheng, 2004).

Reproduction
*Lotus corniculatus* reproduces by seed and plants also spread by modified stems (stolons) and rhizomes. (OSU, undated). Jones & Turkington (1986) state that establishment of new plants from seed is rare. New shoots can arise from root crowns. (OSU, undated). The flowering period is indefinite, so the seeds set over a long summer period. Hard seeds overwinter in the soil prior to germinating and can build up seed banks. (Jones & Turkington, 1986). In some grasslands, *L. corniculatus* can flower in the first year and annually thereafter. (Jones & Turkington, 1986). The flowers are cross-pollinated by honey bees due to self-sterility. (Frame, undated (a)). After pollination, it takes between 24 and 71 days for plants to produce mature seeds. (Jones and Turkington, 1986).
General Impacts

Lotus corniculatus forms dense mats which choke out and shade native vegetation. It grows well in the arid midwest US and is problematic in prairies and open or disturbed areas such as roadsides. Prescribed burns facilitate seed germination, which threatens native prairies. (MNDNR, 2006). One study reported that suspected photosensitization occurred in lambs grazing L. corniculatus. One group of sucking lambs developed skin lesions on the back and ears. The tips of the ears in a few animals were shortened by 2-3 centimeters. (Stafford, 1995).

Management Info

Physical: To control small infestations of L. corniculatus, dig up plants by roots, making sure to remove all root fragments. (USDA Forest Service, 2006). For larger infestations, frequent mowing (more than once every 3 weeks) at a height of less than two inches (OSU, undated) for several years helps to control the plant but may set back native plants (USDA Forest Service, 2006). Controlled burns of L. corniculatus are not recommended because they increase seed germination and promote seedling establishment. (USDA Forest Service, 2006).

Chemical: L. corniculatus can be effectively controlled with general use herbicides such as: clopyralid, glyphosate, and triclopyr. (USDA Forest Service, 2006). Jones & Turkington (1986) report that morfamquat, ioxynil plus meprop, 2,4-D-mecoprop, dichlorprop, fenoprop, and dicamba are effective herbicide treatments on L. corniculatus, while MCPA-salt, 2,4-D-amine and ester have no effect. Acumen and basagran MCPB are considered very toxic herbicide treatments for L. corniculatus seedlings. Considerable damage to seedlings was caused by: brasoran, gesagard, and opogard; EPTC was considered an ineffective treatment. L. corniculatus showed no response to carbofuran or benomyl. (Jones & Turkington, 1986). "Spot spraying affected areas, (after re-greening from a burn or mowing), with clopyralid + surfactant + dye. (This selective herbicide also affects native plants of the sunflower and pea families.)" (MNDNR, 2006).

Pathway

Because of its nitrogen-fixing capabilities, L. corniculatus can be utilized to aid in sand dune revegetation. (Ede, 1997).

Principal source:

Compiler: National Biological Information Infrastructure (NBII) & IUCN/SSC Invasive Species Specialist Group (ISSG)

Review:

Publication date: 2006-11-16

ALIEN RANGE

[2] ARGENTINA
[1] AZERBAIJAN
[1] CHILE
[2] GEORGIA
[1] ICELAND

[6] AUSTRALIA
[2] CANADA
[1] COSTA RICA
[1] GREECE
[5] INDIA
FULL ACCOUNT FOR: *Lotus corniculatus*

**KAZAKHSTAN**

**MONGOLIA**

**RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

**SOUTH GEORGIA AND THE SOUTH SANDWICH ISLANDS**

**LEBANON**

**TAJIKISTAN**

**TURKMENISTAN**

**UKRAINE**

**UNITED STATES**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

26 references found for *Lotus corniculatus*

**Management information**


Summary: Discusses the many common invasive plant species shared by Japan and south eastern Australia. 


Summary: A great fact sheet with information on uses, especially agricultural. 


Summary: Very explicit review of *L. corniculatus*, giving detailed scientific information. 


Summary: Very explicit review of *L. uliginosus*, giving detailed scientific information. 


Summary: A list of potentially invasive non-native plants in puget sound. 

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR). 2006. *Lotus corniculatus*The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Website (Online). 

Summary: Contains good information on management and ecological threats posed by *L. corniculatus*. 


Summary: This paper contains a decision making template for managers dealing with invasive species. 

USDA Forest Service. 2006. *Bird’s Foot Trefoil (Lotus corniculatus)*. Weed of the Week.

Summary: A fact sheet a variety of different management methods and general characteristics. 


Summary: This database compiles information on alien species from British Overseas Territories. 
Available from: http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-3660 [Accessed 10 November 2009]

**General information**


Summary: Gives a brief description of bird s foot trefoil s potential as a poisonous plant. 


Summary: A site awaiting information authenticity that states several common names for *L. corniculatus*. 

**Summary:** This study investigated the potential of *L. corniculatus* and *L. uliginosus* as pasture crops under different grazing management practices in Australia.


**Summary:** A great study about the capability of bird s foot trefoil to help revegetate sand dunes. [Accessed 10 November 2006]


**Summary:** An online database that provides taxonomic information, common names, synonyms and geographical jurisdiction of a species. In addition links are provided to retrieve biological records and collection information from the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) Data Portal and bioscience articles from BioOne journals.


**Summary:** A journal article containing very detailed information on characteristics, habitat, distribution in the british isles. Available from: [http://www.jstor.org/view/00220477/id985463/98p03937/0?searchUrl=http%3a//www.jstor.org/searchBasicResults%3fhp%3d%2526si%3d1%26Query%3dlotus%2bcorniculatus&frame=noframe&currentResult=00220477%2bd985463%2b98p03937%2b98p03937%2b0cF7%2bF7%2bF7%2bF7%2bF7%2bF711F&userID=80ad0f28@vt.edu/01cc99331159310e804e03&dpi=3&config=jstor](http://www.jstor.org/view/00220477/id985463/98p03937/0?searchUrl=http%3a//www.jstor.org/searchBasicResults%3fhp%3d%2526si%3d1%26Query%3dlotus%2bcorniculatus&frame=noframe&currentResult=00220477%2bd985463%2b98p03937%2b98p03937%2b0cF7%2bF7%2bF7%2bF7%2bF7%2bF711F&userID=80ad0f28@vt.edu/01cc99331159310e804e03&dpi=3&config=jstor) [Accessed 12 November 2006]


**Summary:** An extensive global distribution of bird s foot trefoil and many common names. Available from: [http://www.ildis.org/legumeweb/Version~10.01](http://www.ildis.org/legumeweb/Version~10.01) [Accessed 11 November 2006]


**Summary:** Describes the agricultural range and uses of *L. corniculatus*. Available from: [http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/Crops/Birdsfoot_trefoil.html](http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/Crops/Birdsfoot_trefoil.html) [Accessed 13 November 2006]


**Summary:** A fact sheet with good information on similar species. Available from: [http://www.oardc.ohio-state.edu/weedguide/singlerecord.asp?id=400](http://www.oardc.ohio-state.edu/weedguide/singlerecord.asp?id=400) [Accessed 9 November 2006]


**Summary:** Describes the potential photosensitization of lambs that graze on *L. corniculatus*. Available from: [http://vt.library.ingentaconnect.com/content/nzvet/1995/00000043/00000003/art00008](http://vt.library.ingentaconnect.com/content/nzvet/1995/00000043/00000003/art00008) [Accessed 12 November 2006]


**Summary:** This source describes some characteristics and adaptations of *L. corniculatus*. Available from: [http://www.umass.edu/cdp/publications/Birdfoot.htm](http://www.umass.edu/cdp/publications/Birdfoot.htm) [Accessed 10 November 2006]


**Summary:** This site briefly outlines some characteristics of *L. corniculatus* and provides an extensive range data. Available from: [http://www.oardc.ohio-state.edu/weedguide/singlerecord.asp?id=400](http://www.oardc.ohio-state.edu/weedguide/singlerecord.asp?id=400) [Accessed 9 November 2006]


**Summary:** This site briefly outlines some characteristics of *L. corniculatus* and provides an extensive range data. Available from: [http://www.ars-grin.gov/cgi-bin/npgs/html/taxon.pl?300317](http://www.ars-grin.gov/cgi-bin/npgs/html/taxon.pl?300317) [Accessed 11 November 2006]


**Summary:** This profile contained excellent distribution information for the US and information on invasiveness. Available from: [http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=LOCO6](http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=LOCO6) [Accessed 7 November 2006]
GLOBAL INVASIVE SPECIES DATABASE
FULL ACCOUNT FOR: *Lotus corniculatus*


**Summary:** A brief fact sheet containing a practical description of its characteristics and field marks.


**Summary:** Describes the distribution and habitat of *L. corniculatus* in China.