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# *Weeds in the Garden*

## Yellow Sweet Clover

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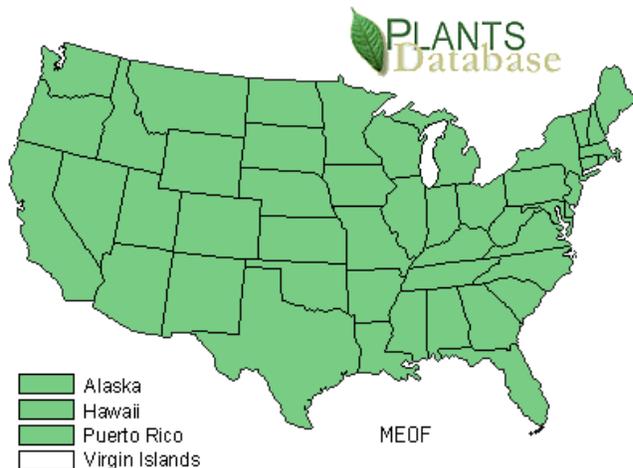
**Common Name:** Yellow sweet clover

**Scientific Name:** *Melilotus officinalis*

**Characteristics:** Yellow sweet clover gives off the fragrance of new-mown hay when crushed or dried. It grows three to eight feet high and has alternate divided leaves, which are finely toothed. Its leaves have the typical “clover” shape but are somewhat elongated. Flowers are yellow and grow on two to four inch racemes. It blooms late spring to fall.

**Origin:** Yellow sweet clover is a native to Europe and Asia. It was brought to North America in the late 1600’s as an agricultural forage and a honey production crop.

**Current Range:** Found in all 50 states, yellow sweet clover is well distributed through the Upper Midwest.



**Habitat:** Yellow sweet clover grows well in full sun or partial shade. It is most frequently found in open, disturbed upland habitats, often along roadsides or in waste places.

**“Look Alikes”:** White sweet clover is very similar to yellow, but has white flower heads. It is also an exotic invasive.

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**The Problem:** Both yellow and white sweet clovers were widely introduced as pasture and agricultural plants and have also been planted as soil enhancers (to fix nitrogen). They can crowd and shade out native species. They may also be “allopathic”, a term applied to plants that emit a chemical compound which discourages other species from growing nearby. Both of these clovers have a deep tap root system, which makes removal difficult, and their seeds can be viable in the soil for up to 30 years. Burning can stimulate clover production if not repeated for more than one year.

**Solutions:**

*Prevention* – Education and citizen awareness can play a huge role in controlling this exotic species. Gardeners and landscapers can slow its spread by eliminating its use in yards and gardens. Plants already in cultivation can be removed and destroyed.

*Mechanical* – Burning for two years in a row or more in early spring may reduce populations. For small infestations hand pulling may be effective. This should be done in late May or early June before the second year plants flower. A third option is to cut stands before flowering.

*Chemical* - Prior to use of chemical herbicides, it is important to consult with local natural resource staff to determine which herbicides would be the most effective and would have the least impact on native species. It is also essential to follow safety instructions on the selected product.

**For more information please contact the  
Ottawa National Forest at:  
E6248 U.S.2, Ironwood, Michigan 49938 (906)932-1330**

