



Southeast Exotic Pest Plant Council Invasive Plant Manual

Common Name: Coltsfoot, horsefoot, foalfoot, assfoot, ginger.

Scientific Name: *Tussilago farfara* L.

Coltsfoot is a perennial herb in the Asteraceae family. It is native to Europe and has a long history of being used as an expectorant. The name 'Tussilago' comes from the Latin 'tussis' which means cough. The name Coltsfoot refers to the horseshoe shaped leaves.

Height: Flowers grow to a height of 7.5 to 30.5 cm.

Leaves: The cordate (heart-shaped) leaves are slightly toothed, upright and the underside is whitish. They arise directly from the root with no main stem present. Individual leaves are 7.5 to 17.5 cm wide.

Flowers: The solitary flowers are dandelion-like and bright yellow in color. There are several scaly white flower stalks per plant. Flowers emerge before the leaves in early spring through June.



Photo by Leslie J. Mehrhoff

Seeds: The brown nutlets are attached to a pappus resembling the seeds of common dandelion.

Life History

Coltsfoot is a perennial with a multi-branched rhizome. In the early spring the flower stalks emerge before the leaves. Each stalk bears a solitary flower, which opens only on sunny days. The leaves appear after the flowers have matured; the flowers and leaves are usually not seen at the same time. The flowers and leaves arise directly from the rootstock. Coltsfoot reproduces both vegetatively and sexually. The roots can remain dormant underground for long periods of time. In some cases, coltsfoot has been known to reemerge after soil disturbance, and very small fragments of roots can produce new plants.



Photo by Ohio State Univ

Origin and Distribution

A native of Europe, this plant was probably brought to this country by early settlers for its medicinal properties. It has spread throughout the northeastern United States from Maine to North Carolina, west to Tennessee and north to Minnesota.



Photo by Leslie J. Mehrhoff

Similar Species

The ray-like flowers of Coltsfoot resemble dandelions (*Taraxacum officinale*). Dandelions differ by having a smooth flower stalk with milky white sap and long lobed leaves. The leaves of coltsfoot resemble many species including violets (*Viola* sp.), some forms of rattlesnake-root (*Prenanthes* sp.), and golden ragwort (*Senecio aureus*).

Habitat

Coltsfoot thrives in low-lying mesic areas including stream banks, moist field or pastures, roadsides, and disturbed areas. It can also be found in drier sites and in poor soils. It is intolerant of shade and is not commonly found in wooded areas, though it has been documented invading forests following fire.

Management Recommendations

Mechanical Control

Initial infestations may be controlled by hand pulling. It is critical that all of the underground portions of the plant are removed. Pulling when the ground is moist may make it easier to remove the entire plant. Residual roots left in the soil may resprout and possibly create several new plants. Hand pull before the plant has set seed to reduce the further spread.

Herbicidal Control

Foliar Spray: This method is effective on large populations or where mechanical control measures are not feasible or are impractical. Apply a 2% solution of glyphosate or triclopyr and water plus a non-ionic surfactant using a tank or backpack sprayer to thoroughly cover all leaves. Do not apply so heavily that herbicide drips off the leaf surface. Glyphosate is a non-selective herbicide requiring caution not to spray non-target species. Triclopyr is selective for broad leaf plants and is best used in areas where native grasses are present. Treatments should be done in the summer when the leaves of coltsfoot are fully developed. Refer to manufacturer's label for specific information and restrictions regarding use.

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Last updated on Wednesday, November 05, 2003 at 01:20 PM
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