Catalog of Species Search Results

:: Catalog of Species Search

Tussilago farfara

(Coltsfoot)

COMMON NAME

Coltsfoot

FULL SCIENTIFIC NAME

Tussilago farfara L.

FAMILY NAME COMMON

Aster family

FAMILY SCIENTIFIC NAME

Asteraceae

IMAGES

Habit

Spreading Rhizomes

Fruit

Close-up of

Close-up of

Leaves

Flowers Seed Head

Incursion

NOMENCLATURE/SYNONYMS

Synonyms: None

DESCRIPTION

Botanical Glossary

Tussilago farfara is an herbaceous perennial that can grow up to 0.5 m (1.6 ft.), but is usually smaller. It has spreading rhizomes that allow for clonal growth. The leaves of this plant are long petioled and cordate to suborbicular in shape. They have a deep, narrow sinus and the margins are callous-denticulate and have shallow lobes. They are 5-20 cm (2-8 in.) long and the same in width. The tops of the leave are glabrous, while below they have white, short, matted, woolly hairs.

The yellow flowers of *Tussilago farfara* are present on scaly scapes that are sent up by the rhizomes in early spring before the leaves develop. Like many members of the Asteraceae, the flowers have many rays. The heads of the flowers are first cylindric in shape and then expand to be about 3 cm (1.2 in.) in diameter. The bracts beneath the flowers (known as a involucre) are 8-15 mm (0.3-0.6 in.) in diameter. The flowers mature into white balls of tufted seeds similar to dandelions. The seeds are 0.3 cm (0.125 in.) long, cylindrical in shape and yellow or red brown in color.

Page References Fernald 1525, Gleason & Cronquist 560, Holmgren 528, Magee & Ahles 1007, Newcomb 358, Peterson & McKenny 110. See reference section below for full citations.

SIMILAR SPECIES

Taraxacum officinale G.H. Weber ex Wiggers (dandelion)

One of the main differences between these plants is that the scape which bears the flower of *Tussilago farfara* has scales on it, while the scape of *Taraxacum officinale* is smooth.

REPRODUCTIVE/DISPERSAL MECHANISMS

The seeds are dispersed by the wind, and have been reported to travel up to 8 miles.

DISTRIBUTION

Tussilago farfara is native to Europe. It has been reported in Canada, and is considered a provincial noxious weed in Ontario. In the United States it is present from Maine to North Carolina and west to Minnesota, as well as in Washington state.

HISTORY OF INTRODUCTION IN NEW ENGLAND

Tussilago farfara was likely introduced into the eastern part of North America by early European settlers. The herb was used medicinally, as well as in teas, candy and as tobacco. It was likely planted in herb gardens, and spread via planting or rhizomes.

HABITATS IN NEW ENGLAND

Tussilago farfara is well adapted to poor, wet soils and can be found along roads, in pastures, in open forests and along rivers. Though the plant can tolerate full sun, it thrives in partial shade.

THREATS

Tussilago farfara can form large colonies because of its rhizomes. The colonies can crowd out native species. These rhizomes can go as deep as 3 m (almost 10 ft.) making it difficult to dig out. Since the seeds are wind-dispersed, they have the potential to travel relatively long distances. Also, because this plant flowers early (with the flower stalks sometimes pushing through the snow) it can disperse its seeds earlier than many native plants.

MANAGEMENT LINKS

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
Description and information about chemical control

DOCUMENTATION NEEDS

Documentation required: A photograph of the flowers and leaves.
Best time for documentation: Spring, summer, fall.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
General information and photographs

USDA Plants Database
General information and a map

Ohio Perennial and Biennial Weed Guide

Photographs, general information, "Facts and Folklore"

Integrated Taxonomic Information System

REFERENCES

Andersen, R.N. 1968. Germination and Establishment of Weeds for Experimental Purposes. Weed Science Society of America Handbook. WSSA, Illinois.

Bailey, L.H. 1949. Manual of Cultivated Plants. Macmillan, New York.

Fernald, M.L. 1950. Gray's Manual of Botany 8th edition. American Book Company, New York.

Foster, S. and J.A. Duke. 1990. A Field Guide to Medicinal Plants. Eastern and Central North America Houghton Mifflin Co New York, USA.

Gleason H.A. and A.C. Cronquist. 1991. Manual of Vascular Plants of the Northeastern United States and Adjacent Canada. 2nd ed. New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, New York.

Holmgren N.H. 1998. Illustrated Companion to Gleason and Cronquist's Manual. New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, New York.

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Newcomb N. 1977. Newcomb's Wildflower Guide. Little Brown, Boston.

Peterson R.T. and M. McKenny. 1968. A field Guide to Wildflowers of Northeastern and North-central North America. Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

USDA, NRCS. 2001. The PLANTS Database, Version 3.1. (http://plants.usda.gov). National Plant Data Center, Baton Rouge, LA 70874-4490 USA.

DATA RETRIEVAL

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MAPS OF PLANT DISTRIBUTION IN NEW ENGLAND

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