

Lucerne

Medicago falcata

Common Name: Lucerne

Scientific Name: *Medicago falcata*

Family: Fabaceae

Description

Lucerne, or yellow alfalfa, is a perennial plant in the pea family. The flowers are yellow and the seed pods curved or half-moon shaped. It is a hardy forage crop for grazing animals. It is closely related to, and often hybridizes with, alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*) so these are often considered subspecies.

Range in Yukon

Lucerne is known from the communities of Whitehorse, Mayo, Faro, Carmacks, Stewart Crossing and Haines Junction, but in recent years has spread rapidly, especially along the Alaska and Haines highways. Alfalfa is also widespread throughout the southern Yukon.

Similar Species

Alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*) is not as invasive, but is persistent and slowly spreads in disturbed areas. It can be separated from Lucerne by having pods that are spirally coiled. It comes in colours from white to dark purple including blue, red and yellow. Black Medick (*Medicago lupulina*) is an annual plant that creeps along the ground. It has shown up occasionally at some mine reclamation sites and the Dempster corner.

Ecological Impact

Lucerne may facilitate the invasion of other exotic or native species by increasing the nitrogen contents in the soil. It may invade undisturbed grasslands, reducing biodiversity and changing community structure.

Control

Perennial plants require depletion of nutrient reserves in the root system, prevention of seed production and prevention of dispersal.



Photo: Stephan Gottermann, YG