

Lesser Celandine

Unwanted Color!

By Stephen Griner 2010

Generally, within the lawn care industry, we don't anticipate seeing weeds emerge until the spring. That is when we need to get our tanks and herbicides back on the road in order to control weed problems. *Lesser Celandine*, however, has thrown us a curve and changes our schedule. It is an early nuisance.

Lesser Celandine, a perennial in the Buttercup family, was actually introduced as a desired ornamental/herbaceous plant (perhaps in the 17th or 18th century) and is still available commercially. Considered an invasive, unwanted weed, it is found in 20 Northeastern states as well as Oregon, Washington, and several Canadian provinces.



Also known as **Fig Buttercup**, it is predominantly found in moist and forested flood plains but can also thrive in drier upland areas. The leaves of this weed are shiny dark green with a kidney to heart shape. It grows to five inches in height. Its flowers are butter yellow in color with 8-12 glossy petals and are usually visible in March/April. Because of its yellow flower, it is often misidentified as a **Marsh Marigold**. A few differences are that **Marsh Marigold** does not produce tubers or bulblets and grows in dispersed clumps, unlike *Lesser Celandine* which has the potential to "carpet" an area.



Emerging in late winter/early spring before most native ephemerals (basically short lived plants) emerge, *Lesser Celandine* spreads primarily via bulblets and tubers, however, it also can spread by seed. The bulblets are cream colored and are easily dislodged from their leaf stalks which give it the ability to spread quite easily. The tubers are tiny finger-like roots that underlie each plant and can also contribute to its spread. Because of these reproducing plant parts, it has the ability to 'carpet' an area over a few seasons. During flood conditions (we have had a few of those in the last few seasons) the propagatable tissue can move with water and emerge in new locations. Since the bulblets are easily dislodged from the leaf stalks, animal activity can dislodge the bulblets and contribute to its movement. Even though the process of digging the weeds out of the ground is the best way to fight the spread, if all parts of the plant are not removed, the remaining plant parts can contribute to its spread. Because it can multiply quickly, it is a threat to native ephemerals purely by out-competing them for sunlight and nutrients.

The control of this invasive weed is very difficult because the aboveground growth is very short lived. In our area, the above ground growth will disappear after it flowers in late May/Early June. For a small infestation, thorough mechanical removal is the best eradication method. If the infestation has gotten out of control, the use of non-selective herbicides (Roundup) will work over time. The timing of herbicide sprays is crucial because the plant does not persist throughout the growing season above ground. The best type of herbicide to use is something that will persist in the plant and move down into the bulblet and tubers, which is what is responsible for the rapid spread of this weed. Applications can be made during the winter season as long as the temperature is above 50 degrees and rainfall is not anticipated for 12 hours. It may take several years to get *Lesser Celandine* under control, but if steps are not taken to achieve control, it can easily take over an area and compromise the health of other desired plant material and beds.

