

# Invasive Alien Plant Species of Virginia

## Crown Vetch (*Coronilla varia* L.)

### Description

Crown vetch, a member of the pea family, is a perennial herb with creeping stems that may reach two to six feet in length. The compound leaves bear fifteen to twenty-five leaflets. The pea-like, pink to white flowers occur in clusters at the end of extended stalks. The narrow, leathery seed pods may be two to three inches long. The following three characteristics together distinguish crown vetch from other legumes: 1) its compound leaves have an odd number of leaflets, 2) the leaves and flower stalks arise from the main stem, and 3) the flowers occur in a radiating cluster known as an umbell.

### Habitat

Crown vetch prefers open, sunlight areas. It is found along roadsides, railroads, and open fields.

### Distribution

The native range of crown vetch is Europe, northern Africa, and southwest Asia. It was introduced into the United States for use in erosion control along highway embankments and as a green fertilizer crop. Crown vetch is widespread throughout Virginia.

### Threats

Crown vetch spreads rapidly

through seed and its multi-branched, creeping root system. Native plant species are overcome by the dense growth of this aggressive alien. The character of a natural area can be transformed from a richly diverse habitat into just another weedy tract.

### Control

Several methods may be used to control crown vetch and are particularly effective if used in some combination. Late spring mowing where feasible will provide some control of this invasive plant. Mowing should be repeated over several years to insure effectiveness. A prescribed burn in late spring will control crown vetch. A follow-up treatment with a glyphosate herbicide in the fall and following spring will eliminate plants regenerated from underground parts or sprouted from seed. Light infestations may be treated with a glyphosate herbicide. Glyphosate herbicides are recommended because they are biodegradable. However, glyphosate is a nonselective, systemic herbicide that affects all green vegetation. To be safe and effective, herbicide use requires careful knowledge of the chemicals, appropriate concentrations, and the effective method and timing of their application. Consult an agricultural extension



*Crown Vetch (Coronilla varia L.)*

agent or natural resource expert for more information on prescribed burning and herbicide control of invasive species.

### Alternative Plants for Cultivation

Native species which exhibit similar values as crown vetch but are not invasive are available from local nurseries or by mail order from native plant suppliers. Roundheaded bushclover (*Lespedeza capitata*) and partridge pea (*Cassia fasciculata*) are two native legumes which add nitrogen to the soil, provide food for wildlife and act as ground cover. Big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium sco-*

For more information, contact the Department of Conservation and Recreation or the Virginia Native Plant Society.



Department of Conservation & Recreation  
CONSERVING VIRGINIA'S NATURAL AND RECREATIONAL RESOURCES  
217 Governor Street, Richmond, VA 23219  
(804) 786-7951; <http://www.state.va.us/~dcr/vaher.html>

Jim Gilmore, Governor • John Paul Woodley, Jr., Secretary of Natural Resources • David G. Brickley, Director, Department of Conservation and Recreation



### Virginia Native Plant Society

Blandy Experimental Farm  
400 Blandy Farm Lane, Unit 2  
Boyce, VA 22620  
(540) 837-1600  
<http://www.vnps.org>

# Invasive Alien Plant Species Fact Sheet

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*parium*), and Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) are native warm season grasses which can help control erosion and make excellent livestock forage.

More information on native warm season grasses can be obtained from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA, 23230-11041.

For more information on this and other invasive plant species,

contact the Virginia Native Plant Society or the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation at the addresses below.

**Illustration** from *New Britton & Brown Illustrated Flora of the Northeast U.S. and Adjacent Canada*, by H.H. Gleason, New York Botanical Gardens Scientific Publications. Used with permission.

### References

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