

CREeping BUTTERCUP



WHY IS IT A WEED?

Takes over pasture

WHERE IS IT FOUND?

Most of New Zealand

IS IT TOXIC?

Yes, to cattle

IT'S ALMOST the end of winter, so I decided to focus on a weed that is best eradicated in the spring months: creeping buttercup. This typical yellow-flowered perennial plant is most commonly found in gardens and cultivated pastures, in particular the wetter and low lying areas of your paddocks.

As a child, a popular game from memory was putting a buttercup flower underneath your chin to work out whether you liked butter or not, guaranteed to tell you yes!

Sometime between here and early spring, take a walk, see if you can identify the leaves of the buttercup and if so, begin to develop a plan to eliminate competition in your lawn or pastures.

The life cycle of the creeping buttercup can last around 18 months. However, in that time large stolons spread from the base of the plant and from there, daughter plants grow from the nodes of the stolon. The buttercup prefers to establish in moist areas, with high fertility. It has an uncanny knack to tolerate wet conditions, favouring summer-safe areas of New Zealand such as the Taranaki and Tararua areas. Some say the name *Ranunculus* is Latin for 'little frog', based on its ability to establish near waterways and damp areas.

Identifying creeping buttercup isn't difficult thanks to its distinctive, bright flowers. The low-growing plant is able to create a mat across your lawn or pasture. The leaves are hairy and triangular in shape, around 5cm long and divided into three distinctive lobes. Pale patches on the leaves are a distinctive aspect of the buttercup.

There are two other common buttercups in New Zealand. One is the giant buttercup. Its leaves have more lobes which are more jagged but still the distinctive yellow flower. While the creeping plant has stolons, giant buttercup grows in height from clumps.

The other is hairy buttercup, an annual weed which often establishes in autumn and sets seed in spring.

HOW TO CONTROL IT

Eliminating the plant can be achieved a number of ways. Manually pulling it is one option but you need to make sure you get everything, otherwise the plant can grow from even fragments of the root crown or stolon.

The best time to spray is from late autumn through to early spring. Seedlings are controlled but – like all weeds – the more mature the plant, the less susceptible

to active ingredients like MCPA, MCPB and bentazone. These chemicals will have no impact on your grass, however it can check your clovers.

Thifensulfuron also eradicates buttercup from pasture but is harsher on clover. Always read the label before applying for the most up-to-date information. ■

WARNING

Newly-established buttercup plants are toxic to grazing animals so make sure there is plenty of pasture to graze so stock don't get tempted to sample it. If you find buttercup in your hay, don't be alarmed - the toxin protoanemonin is not very stable and loses its potency when the plant is dried.

STEPHANIE SLOAN grew up on a sheep and beef farm in the Wairarapa. She is now part of PGG Wrightson's agronomy team, identifying weeds on a daily basis.

