



CLIPPINGS a weekly column from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

Week of July 15, 2019

For Immediate Release

A Pretty and Useful Weed

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A cool, wet spring brought about the proliferation of yellow woodsorrel in many home gardens and lawns, including mine. But, while considered a weed, it has its attributes – pretty color, relatively easy to control and unique uses.

Yellow woodsorrel prefers moist soil so it's no surprise it has done well this year. However, it is tolerant of a wide range of conditions ranging from full sun to partial shade, lawns to sidewalk cracks and fertile to poor soil. This is probably one reason why it is found in 46 states.

These annual plants are delicate looking, growing 3-8 inches tall. Each pale green leaf consists of three heart-shaped leaflets similar to a clover leaf, with faintly hairy margins. The leaves are creased, which allows them to fold upward in half at night or when stressed, such as when picked or during storms.



If you look closely, yellow woodsorrel has small, ¼ to ½-inch yellow flowers. When open, there are 5 yellow petals held in an open cup. Blooms occur mid-spring through mid-August. After blooming, flowers are replaced by elongated, ridged seed pods that are pointed at the end. The seed pods are erect and held at right angles to their stems.

Yellow woodsorrel is best controlled by hand weeding, mulching and mowing. From my experience, it pulls easily and does not re-sprout from roots left behind. But, remove plants before seed pods develop as when pulled, the pods explode distributing seed up to 13 feet in all directions.

Although edible, yellow woodsorrel should be consumed in moderation. It contains high levels of oxalic acid that is toxic when consumed in excessive amounts. People with kidney disease, kidney stones, rheumatoid arthritis or gout should not eat yellow woodsorrel.

The leaves and flowers have a sour, tart, lemony flavor and are sometimes added to salads for flavor and decoration. The green pods have a juicy, crisp texture and a tartness similar to rhubarb. The whole plant can be brewed as a tea or the leaves may be steeped in boiling water for 5-10 minutes and then sweetened to make a beverage that tastes similar to lemonade.

Historically, woodsorrel leaves had a variety of herbal medicinal uses. Wildlife, such as several bird species, field mice, deer and rabbits – regularly feed on woodsorrel. And when the plant is boiled, an orange dye can be obtained and used in art projects.

Finally, yellow woodsorrel can be thought of as a “good” weed. Here is wishing that all the weeds in our garden were as pretty and useful!

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