

WHITE CLOVER

Trifolium repens



Photographs are courtesy of Dr Sheldon Navie

Description & life cycle

There are many different species of Clover, but White Clover (*Trifolium repens*) is the familiar weed of lawns and is commonly referred to as Clover.

Clover is a native of Europe. It is a pasture legume that has spread from cultivation and become a pest of turf. Prior to 1940, Clover was popular in lawns due to its amazing ability to transfer nitrogen from the air into the soil. This process is called "Nitrogen Fixation".

Clover is a short-lived perennial 10 - 30 cm tall, with shamrock-like leaves of 3 wedge-shaped leaflets, often with a "V" marking near the base. It creeps along the ground surface by means of stolons

Clover produces white to pale pink flower clusters at the top of upright stalks from August to November. Its tiny fruit remain hidden inside the old flower parts. Flowers are produced even at cutting heights of less than 25 mm, sometimes even persisting at mowing heights as low as 8 mm.

Clover likes moist, fine textured soils and cool climates, making it primarily a Winter weed. Infestation of turf is worst during seasons of excessive rainfall or in soils with high potassium fertilisation. Clover has a relatively shallow root system, meaning it tends to dry out quickly during hot weather.

Key features

- > Soft, green leaves which become slippery underfoot
- > Forms thick clumps which smothers the turf underneath
- > 3 wedge-shaped leaflets although sometimes producing 4 leaflets, which is considered a sign of good luck

Control

Despite its familiarity, Clover is a difficult weeds to control in turf. It has a waxy leaf coating that repels water and makes it difficult to successfully contact spray solutions. Under good growing conditions, it is also prone to forming dense clumps that are hard to penetrate. Like all weeds, Clover is best controlled early in its life cycle when its young and actively growing.

Selective herbicides with combinations of Dicamba, MCPA & Mecoprop do the best job, and are useful in controlling many other "broadleaf weeds" as well

Many product manufacturers recommend the addition of a surfactant to assist in wetting & this vastly improves results on Clover. Follow-up treatments are recommended for complete control.

As with most weeds, prevention is better than cure and good turf management, such as regular mowing, are vital in minimising infestations.

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