

Invasive Alien Plant Species of Virginia

Chinese Lespedeza (*Lespedeza cuneata* (Dumont) G. Don)

Description

A member of the pea family, Chinese lespedeza is an herbaceous to somewhat woody perennial. Stems have numerous ascending branches which may grow 3 to 5 feet high. Leaves are compound; each leaf has three leaflets. Leaflets are wedge-shaped to oblong, and are green or sometimes silvery. Flowers occur close to the stem at the bases of the upper and median leaves. The flowers may be solitary or in clusters of 2 - 4. Petals are less than half an inch long, creamy white with violet-purple streaks or veins. The seed pod, called a legume, is flattened and oval. Another common name for Chinese lespedeza is sericea, a name which refers to the silky silvery undersides of the leaves.

Habitat

Chinese lespedeza is commonly found in sparse woodlands, fields, meadows, roadsides and disturbed open ground. Chinese lespedeza may form dense stands on sterile eroded slopes. It is drought-resistant.

Distribution

This plant was first introduced into the southern United States from eastern Asia. It has been used for erosion control, soil improvement, and as a source of food and cover

for wildlife. Chinese lespedeza has spread throughout the south and parts of the Midwest. In Virginia, it is found in most of the state, but is particularly common in the piedmont and coastal plain.

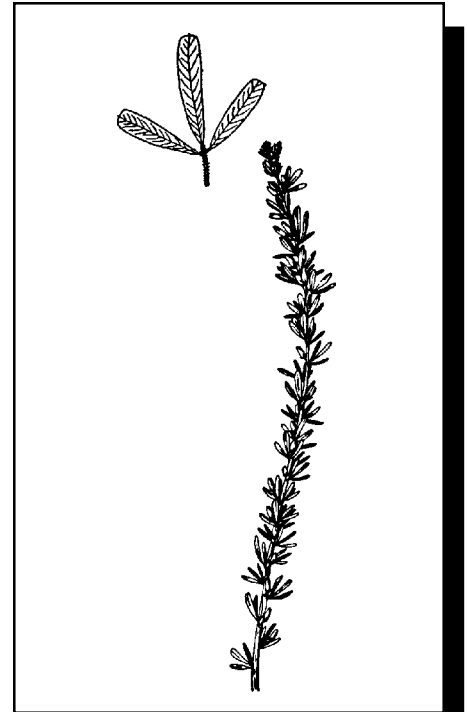
Threats

Chinese lespedeza forms dense stands which choke out native plant species. Like many other members of the pea family, it adds nitrogen to the soil resulting in a richer soil. This may encourage further infestation by other non-native plant species to the exclusion of native species adapted to poor soil conditions.

Control

Chinese lespedeza's root reserves are low during the flower bud period. Mowing at this time will reduce plant vigor and prevent the production of more seed. This process repeated for 2 - 3 years should reduce the intensity of the infestation.

Foliar application of a glyphosate herbicide is effective late in the growing season while plants are still green. 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 concentra-



Chinese Lespedeza (Lespedeza cuneata (Dumont) G. Don)

tions, and the effective method and timing of their application.

Chinese lespedeza seeds can remain viable in the soil for many years. Fire appears to break seed dormancy in Chinese Lespedeza in seedlings with lower viability. Therefore, prescribed burning used to force the seeds to germinate followed by mechanical or chemical treatments may provide long term control.

Contact an agricultural extension agent or natural resource specialist for more information.

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



Virginia Native Plant Society
P.O. Box 844, Annandale, VA 22030



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

Invasive Alien Plant Species of Virginia

Chinese Lespedeza (*Lespedeza cuneata* (Dumont) G. Don)

Alternatives to Chinese Lespedeza

Native plant species are commercially available which provide erosion control, soil improvement, and food and cover for wildlife but are not invasive to natural landscapes. Roundheaded bushclover (*Lespedeza capitata*) and partridge pea (*Cassia fasciculata*) are two native species which enrich the soil with nitrogen as well as provide forage

for wildlife. Big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), and sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*) are native warm season grasses which provide food and cover for wildlife such as quail, rabbit and songbirds.

More information on native warm season grasses recommended for wildlife 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.

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



Virginia Native Plant Society
P.O. Box 844, Annandale, VA 22030



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