

Sulfur Cinquefoil

Potentilla recta Rose Family

Identification Tips

- Perennial with upright, hairy, leafy, mostly unbranched stems up to 3 feet tall
- Flowers light yellow with 5 heart-shaped petals around a darker yellow center
- Leaves palmately lobed with 5-7 long leaflets uniformly toothed along edges

Biology

Flowers early June-July. Reproduces primarily by seed, but can spread via roots if moved by mechanical equipment. Deep taproot is surrounded by shallow, spreading side roots that regenerate annually. Seeds can remain viable in soil 4 or more years. Individual plants can live up to 20 years.

Impacts

Highly invasive, taking over all types of habitat except full shade; not limited by soil type. Displaces native and beneficial plants. Significantly reduces forage value of rangelands and pastures.

Distribution

Found in many parts of King County in both urban and rural areas. Grows in open grassy areas, pastures, and with shrubs such as Scotch broom. Also found along railroads, logged areas, and roadsides. Thrives in full sun, but will establish in partly shady areas and moist soils.

What You Can Do

The King County Noxious Weed Control Program is actively trying to control the spread of sulfur cinquefoil in the county. Do your part by removing this weed from your property. If you spot sulfur cinquefoil growing in King County, please report its location to our program.

Control Methods

For best results, control methods should be adaptive and employed over several growing seasons. Sulfur cinquefoil is tolerant of low nutrient soils, so fertilizer may help reduce presence in pastures and lawns over time.

Manual:

For small sites with few plants, pull or dig up plants and remove as much root as possible so the plant will not resprout. This method can be highly labor-intensive and, to be fully effective, all mature plants must be removed so that no new seeds are produced. The best time to dig up plants is in spring or early summer when the soil is still moist and the seeds haven't matured. Roots are deep and extensive. If the plant is in seed, carefully bag and cut off seed heads before digging up the rest of the plant.

Questions?

King County Noxious Weed Control Program: **206-477-WEED** kingcounty.gov/weeds

**Class B Noxious Weed:
Control Required**



Originally from Central Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, sulfur cinquefoil was first discovered in Washington in 1937.



Light yellow flowers have 5 heart-shaped petals with a darker yellow center.



Palmately lobed leaves with 5-7 leaflets are uniformly toothed.

Mechanical:

Mowing, however frequent, will not control sulfur cinquefoil because the woody root system stores considerable food reserves; once mowed, plants simply send up new shoots. A single plowing may increase sulfur cinquefoil cover, but on productive agricultural sites an intensive management program that combines cultivation and annual crops will effectively control this weed.

Chemical:

Herbicides can be effective on sulfur cinquefoil, especially if combined with manual control and monitoring for surviving plants. **Follow labels exactly as written and only use products appropriate and legal for the site. Herbicides should only be applied at the specified rates.** Repeat applications may be necessary on regrowth in the fall and next season. Selective broadleaf herbicides with active ingredient triclopyr, aminopyralid, or metsulfuron work. Triclopyr and metsulfuron are best when applied in spring to plants at rosette stage. Aminopyralid should be applied before bud stage. Products containing glyphosate are also effective if applied before buds form. However, glyphosate is “non-selective” and will injure any grass or other plants it touches. After spraying, do not cut down the treated plants until they have completely died. Re-seeding bare areas with grass or other plants will help reduce re-infestation. Chemical control options differ for private, commercial, and government agencies. For questions, contact the Noxious Weed Control Program.



Controlling sulfur cinquefoil often requires manually digging up the rootball for best results.

Could be confused with:

Various native cinquefoils resemble sulfur cinquefoil.

Graceful cinquefoil (*Potentilla gracilis*) is a native plant found in western Washington. It looks very similar to sulfur cinquefoil, but can be distinguished by hairs that lie flat on its stems and leaves, as well as its darker golden yellow flowers. **Marsh cinquefoil (*Comarum palustre*)** might also be confused with sulfur cinquefoil, but has reddish stems, slightly hairy leaf undersides, and red-purple flowers.



Graceful cinquefoil's short hairs lie flat on stems and leaves.



Graceful cinquefoil's golden yellow flower.



Marsh cinquefoil leaves.



Marsh cinquefoil flowers.