

# *Ficaria verna* – Lesser celandine

#### What is it?



Lesser celandine is ephemeral (a type of plant that appears in early spring when there is more available sunlight that dies back once trees are in full leaf). In early summer it will appear to disappear before your very eyes. That does not mean the plant is gone by any means. Look carefully and you will see evidence of the tubers and loose bulblets (reproductive structures that form in the leaf notches on the stem) on the bare soil; a promise that it will come back full force next year. Commonly referred to as fig buttercup, lesser celandine is an herbaceous perennial from the buttercup family (Ranunculaceae). It has glossy yellow flowers with 7 or more long, narrow petals and thick, deep green (sometimes silver splotched), kidney-shaped or lobed leaves.







## Where is it from?

This species was brought to the Western hemisphere from Europe as a garden plant. Although considered a noxious weed in many states it is still commercially available.

## Where is it now?

Lesser celandine is highly adaptive and although it grows most prolifically in floodplains it can grow in higher and drier conditions as well. It is present in all 3 counties in the Upper Raritan Watershed – Hunterdon, Morris, and Somerset – and is especially pervasive in Somerset county along riparian corridors.

#### EDDMapS Distribution:

This map is incomplete and is based only on current site and county level reports made b from USDA Plants Database. For more information, visit www.eddmaps.org



## When does it grow?



Lesser celandine is most easily spotted in early spring when it is in bloom. In our region this is usually the last week in March through the end of May.

## Why is it invasive?

Because lesser celandine emerges earlier than native ephemerals, it has a head start, blanketing the ground and preventing other plants from accessing nutrients from the soil. Another feature of the plant is its reproductive strategy. The bulblets that grow in the leaf nodes can easily fall off when mature and set root as a new plant. Also, because they are highly buoyant, bulblets can travel far distances downstream and recolonize new areas in a short period of time.



## Who is it harming?



Toothwort is host to the now possibly state-extinct West Virginia white (Pieris virginiensis)



Cut-leaf toothwort (Cardamine concatenata)

Who is its look-alike?





#### Marsh marigold

(Caltha palustris)

Native look-alike to lesser celandine

Lesser celandine out-competes native spring ephemerals that host specific pollinator species. In response to the disappearance of the native plants they depend on, the pollinators decline.

The spring beauty andrena (Andrena erigeniae) depends solely on the spring beauty flower (Claytonia virginica) for pollen and nectar





From afar, clusters of lesser celandine look remarkably like the native wetland species marsh marigold (Caltha palustris).



Although they may occur in similar wetland habitats, on close inspection, you'll see that marsh marigold have 5 petals per flower head where lesser celandine has 7 to 12 petals per flower. Other key features for telling them apart - marsh marigold does not produce bulblets, does not have tuberous roots, and is found *only* in wetlands whereas lesser celandine can grow in drier conditions.



## How to control it

Mechanical removal is the best way to take care of small patches. Digging out the entire plant including the tubers is vital to keeping it from regenerating next spring. Make sure that the soil is completely free of loose bulblets as well. Bag up and dispose of all plant parts. Make sure to check the site for regrowth every year and repeat removal if necessary.

For tackling larger infestations please seek out ecologically informed control methods recommended by the NJ Invasive Species Strike Team, <u>https://www.fohvos.info/invasive-species-strike-team/info-center/</u>

### How to replace it

There are many beautiful species of native flowering plants that can be grown in place of lesser celandine including the above-mentioned species: spring beauty, cut-leaf toothwort, & marsh marigold. Here are two more native floodplain ephemerals to plant:



Trout Lily

(Erythronium americanum)



Virginia Bluebells (Mertensia virginica)

The Native Plant Society of New Jersey keeps an updated list of nurseries that sell NJ native plants. You can find their list here: http://www.npsnj.org/pages/nativeplants\_Sources.html

## How to report it

If you discover lesser celandine cropping up in new spots on public lands or on your property, please report your sighting so that others may use this valuable information to research and track the spread of this and other invasive species.

#### Report invasives at the national scale:

EDD Maps (Early Detection and Distribution Mapping System) at https://www.eddmaps.org/

#### To report invasives at the state scale using your mobile device:

NJISST (New Jersey Invasive Species Strike Team) at <u>https://www.fohvos.info/invasive-species-</u> strike-team/nj-invasives-app/