NORTH CAROLINA FOREST SERVICE N C

Invasive Species Leaflet

Excerpted with permission from "Invasive Exotic Plants of North Carolina"
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Lespedeza cuneata (Sericea, Korean or Chinese Lespedeza)

Initial Introduction and Expansion in Range

Native to Asia, *Lespedeza cuneata* was introduced to the United States in the 1940's for soil conservation, wildlife and livestock forage and hay. It is now found throughout the eastern portion of the United States from New York to Florida. It has spread west to Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas. *Lespedeza cuneata* is ubiquitous in North Carolina.

Although originally introduced for forage, as *L. cuneata* ages it develops tough stems and a high tannin content that makes it unpalatable to wildlife and livestock. Some herbivores will eat *L. cuneata* but only early in the season when the shoots are tender or when no other food is available. It is still planted for food (seeds) and cover for quail and for erosion control at construction sites, especially along highways. A prolific seed producer, *L. cuneata* readily escapes from cultivation. The extensive seed bank of this plant can remain viable for decades.

Description and Biology

- Aggressive, warm-season, perennial legume ranging in height from 2 to 5 feet.
- Herbaceous to somewhat woody stems with numerous straight branches.
- Wedge-shaped leaf bases distinguish this plant from other species within the genus *Lespedeza*. Leaves are compound in groups of three arranged alternately along the stem.
- Flowers are white with violet markings along the veins and emerge close to the stem in the leaf axils from the middle to upper portions of the plant. Blooms from mid-July to October.
- Small, tan, oval seeds borne in a legume that are flat and oval shaped.
- Dormant brown plants remain upright during most of the winter.
- Begins growth from root crown buds at the base of the stem from the previous year.

Habitats Susceptible to Invasion

Lespedeza cuneata is adapted to a wide range of climatic conditions enabling it to invade a variety of habitats including fields, meadows, marshes, pond borders, open woodlands and roadsides. It thrives in conditions difficult for other plants such as on eroded, infertile soils and steep slopes. It is drought resistant and is rarely affected by insects and disease. If left unchecked, *L. cuneata* can take over entire fields in three to four years. These stands become so dense that recruitment of native plants is drastically reduced.

Prevention and Control

The complete elimination of *L. cuneata* from natural areas is extremely difficult given that large numbers of viable seeds can remain in the seed bank for years. Any control effort requires years of commitment from land managers. The best way to slow the spread of this plant is the commitment of land managers to no longer recommend and specify the planting of *L. cuneata* for erosion control.

Although prescribed burning is not an effective control method since fire scarifies the seeds and promotes germination, it has been used by land managers to remove the biomass of this plant followed by chemical treatment. Others have used prescribed burning to stimulate germination and speed up getting rid of the seed bank. Mowing *L. cuneata* is also an effective means to remove the biomass prior to chemical treatment.

If burning or mowing is desired, allow the plant to grow back and then follow up during the first growing season with chemical treatment. Apply a solution of 2 quarts triclopyr plus 6 ounces clopyralid per acre and a 0.5 percent nonionic surfactant before the plant sets seed.

THE LABEL IS THE LAW!
WHEN USING ANY PESTICIDE, FOLLOW ALL LABEL INSTRUCTIONS

Citations:
Smith, Cherri. 2008. Invasive Exotic Plants of North Carolina. N.C. Department of Transportation. Raleigh, NC.

Lespedeza cuneata photography by James H. Miller, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org *(left)* and Chris Evans, River to River CWMA, Bugwood.org *(right)*

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