



Image ©Tania Siemens/The Nature Conservancy

# Lesser Celandine

## *Ranunculus ficaria*

Lesser celandine is native to northern Africa, Eurasia, and throughout Europe. It was first introduced to the United States as an ornamental plant, and is now found in 19 states throughout the northeast and the Pacific Northwest, and is considered an invasive in nine of those states, including Oregon.

**OTHER COMMON NAMES:** fig buttercup, pilewort.

### DESCRIPTION

Lesser celandine is an herbaceous perennial. It has a **basal rosette** of dark green, shiny, stalked leaves that are kidney- to heart-shaped. In March and April, its eight-petaled, yellow flowers open on delicate stems. Along the stems of the above-ground portion of the plant, pale-colored **bulblets** form, but are not apparent until late in the flowering period. When in bloom, infestations of lesser celandine appear as a green carpet with yellow dots, spreading across the forest floor. There are several variations of lesser celandine, including a double-flowered form with many crowded petals and dark green leaves mottled with silver markings.<sup>1</sup>

### WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- Dark green, shiny leaves
- Yellow flowers with eight petals
- Pale colored bulblets on stem

### WHEN TO FIND LESSER CELANDINE

It can be found from late winter until the spring (March through May).

### WHERE TO FIND LESSER CELANDINE

It typically grows on moist forested floodplains, in some drier upland areas, and seems to prefer sandy soils.

### WHAT TO DO

Only pull lesser celandine if you are certain of its identification and if you are able to remove all plant material. Lesser celandine may be pulled up by hand or dug up using a hand trowel or shovel. It is very important to remove all bulblets and tubers. Bag and remove pulled plants.

As an exotic spring ephemeral, lesser celandine spends much of the year underground as thickened, finger-like tubers or underground stems. In winter, leaves begin to emerge and flowering occurs from late winter until spring (usually March through May). Afterward flowering, the above ground portion of the plants dies back. Lesser celandine spreads vegetatively through its tubers and bulblets, each of which is able to become a new plant once separated from its parent. The tubers are often dispersed when unearthed and spread by the digging activities of animals or are transported by flood waters.

The primary ecological impact of lesser celandine is on the native spring flowering community and the various wildlife species associated with them. This is because lesser celandine emerges well before native spring ephemeral species and can establish and overtake areas rapidly, preventing the growth of native species. This plant is very difficult to control, but it can be managed with persistence over time using methods that are site appropriate. While manual methods are possible for some (small) infestations, the use of a systemic herbicide can kill the entire plant and minimize soil disturbance.<sup>1</sup>

### REFERENCES

Plant Conservation Alliance's Alien Plant Working Group Web page on Lesser Celandine.

<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/rafi1.htm>

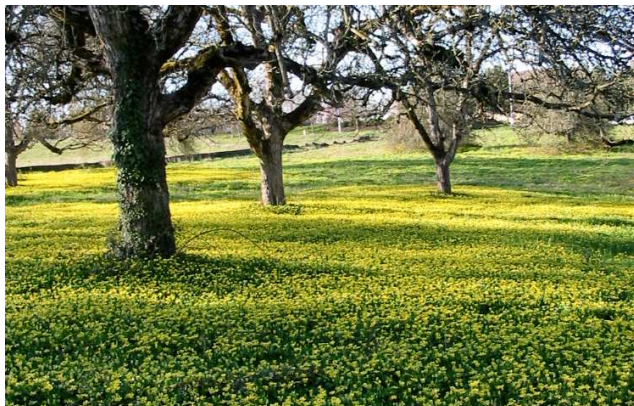


Photo Courtesy of Glenn Miller, Oregon Department of Agriculture