

UNL Extension: Acreage Insights

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Sericea lespedeza: Nebraska's Newest Noxious Weed

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Sericea lespedeza, John M. Randall,
The Nature Conservancy, Bugwood.org

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For those unfamiliar with this invasive plant, the name itself can be difficult. *Sericea lespedeza* is a perennial that grows well in grasslands and pastures as well as along roadsides and drainage areas. It is mainly found in southeast and south-central Nebraska, though it has the potential to invade range and grasslands statewide.

The herbarium record shows that *Sericea lespedeza* was first collected in Richardson County in 1974, but has spread to 3,000 acres in Nebraska. The reason for its introduction is unknown, but it has been promoted in other states for wildlife habitat, and used as a hay crop in southern United States.

Identification

As with many invasive species, learning to identify it is half the battle. The plant generally grows 3-4 feet tall, but will grow anywhere between 2-7 feet tall and can be identified by its alternate leaves. Lower leaf surfaces tend to have short hairs. Stems are straight, slender, and grooved, and can also have short hairs. Flowers, which bloom in late summer, range in color from white to cream or light yellow.

Sericea lespedeza can be not only challenging to pronounce, but to get rid of as well. It is an extremely aggressive invader of open areas. Dense monocultures of thickets are formed due to its ability to sprout from root crowns. Established *Sericea lespedeza* plants will reduce or eliminate competing native vegetation, thus impacting native ecosystems and reducing carrying capacity for livestock (it is not palatable to most livestock).



Control

A combination of two or more control methods (mechanical, chemical, etc.) is the best approach when controlling *Sericea lespedeza*. By utilizing several control options, your odds become greater that more plants will be controlled. Existing infestations spread rapidly through seed dispersal, which can be carried by wildlife, livestock, contaminated hay, vehicles and equipment. Continued monitoring and follow-up are essential for maintaining and reducing infestations.

Everyone's cooperation is needed in spotting and preventing new infestations. Early vigilance and action will prevent the huge cost of controlling large stands of *Sericea lespedeza*. Making it a noxious weed statewide allows County Weed Authorities to educate landowners on how to identify it, make them better prepared to spot new infestations, and eliminate small infestations before they become widespread.

In addition to [*Sericea lespedeza*](#), Nebraska has 11 noxious weeds:

- [Canada thistle](#),
- [leafy spurge](#),
- [musk thistle](#),
- [plumeless thistle](#),
- [purple loosestrife](#),
- [spotted & diffuse knapweed](#),
- [saltcedar](#), [phragmites](#),
- [Japanese knotweed](#), and
- [giant knotweed](#).

The addition of *Sericea lespedeza* to the noxious weed list will aid in efforts preventing its spread beyond southeastern Nebraska.

Contact Information

We need everyone's help, so if you would like more information on purple loosestrife or would like to report an infestation contact the Lancaster County Weed Control Office. Email: weeds@lancaster.ne.gov or phone 402-441-7817.