

CRIMSON CLOVER

Scarlet Clover, Italian Clover

Trifolium incarnatum

Fabaceae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Origin

Crimson Clover is a temperate legume, native to southeastern Europe and southwestern Turkey. It spread to Asia and then to the U.S. by 1819. It has a distinctive, brilliant, crimson cone-shaped head of florets.

Uses

As with other clovers, Crimson Clover is grown for seed, hay, silage, pasture for most livestock and soil improvement. When the foliage is cut and used as a green manure, or turned under, this legume returns nitrogen to the soil. It is a very widely grown, winter crop to be tilled under in the spring.

Common Names

- French
 - Trèfle incarnat
- German
 - Inkarnat-Klee

Cultivation

This clover variety prefers cool, humid weather with 900 mm (35 in) of rainfall yearly. It cannot tolerate extreme drought or standing water and seeds will not germinate at temperatures over 15.5° C (60° F). It makes rapid growth in fall and spring. An adequate crop can be grown but the yield will be much greater if nitrogen is available. The soil should be rich in phosphate and potash and well drained. The inoculant necessary for Crimson Clover is different than that required by other legumes. If Crimson Clover has been grown in the same field, there should be sufficient supply of the necessary bacteria. Higher yields and a longer grazing season are obtained by sowing Crimson Clover with other grasses.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Five to six weeks before flowering, foraging should stop to allow for pollination and seed set. Honeybees are essential for best pollination, as the flower needs to be “tripped” in order for the bee to enter and gather pollen. Seeds are produced when the florets have turned brown from base to the cone-shaped top. Crimson Clover is not usually successful at reseeding as the seeds that drop to the ground germinate immediately with a light rain but die when soil dries out. Varieties have been developed that have a harder seed coat that allows slower germination over a period of time.

Pests and Diseases

Sowing Crimson Clover with other grasses can reduce viruses, other plant diseases and the occurrence of bloat in livestock that graze it. Crown and stem rot during wet, cool weather is the most serious disease, and otherwise Crimson Clover is not susceptible to other diseases, insects or nematodes.

Cooking and Nutrition

Crimson Clover is most nutritious for animals when it is in the half-bloom stage

References

Heuzé V., Tran G., Maxin G., 2016. *Crimson clover (Trifolium incarnatum)*. Feedipedia, a programme by INRA, CIRAD, AFZ and FAO. <https://www.feedipedia.org/node/247> Last updated on April 19, 2016, 11:33

https://plants.usda.gov/factsheet/pdf/fs_trin3.pdf