



# Lesser Celandine *Ranunculus ficaria* L.

**Common Names:** lesser celandine, fig buttercup

**Native Origin:** Europe

**Description:** Lesser celandine is an herbaceous, perennial plant in the buttercup family (Ranunculaceae). Plants have a basal rosette of dark green, shiny, stalked leaves that are kidney-shaped to heart-shaped. The flowers open in March and April, and have 8-12 glossy, butter-yellow petals that are 1 inch wide, and are borne singly on delicate stalks that rise above the leaves. Pale-colored bulblets are produced along the stems of the above-ground portions of the plant, but are not apparent until late in the flowering period. The root system is made up of a cluster of tuberous roots. When in bloom, large infestations of lesser celandine appear as a green carpet with yellow dots, spreading across the forest floor. This plant reproduces by seed and underground tubers.



**Habitat:** Lesser celandine occurs in moist forested floodplains and in some drier upland areas, and seems to prefer sandy soils.

**Distribution:** This species is reported from states shaded on Plants Database map. It is currently found in nineteen states in the Northeast and Pacific Northwest. It is reported to be invasive in nine states (Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Wisconsin, West Virginia), and the District of Columbia.

**Ecological Impacts:** Lesser celandine is an exotic spring ephemeral and a vigorous growing groundcover that forms large, dense patches on the forest floor, displacing and preventing native plants from co-occurring. The ecological impact of lesser celandine is primarily on the native spring-flowering plant community and the various wildlife species associated with them.



**Control and Management:** Lesser celandine 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 systemic herbicide kills the entire plant tip to root and minimizes soil disturbance.

- **Manual-** For small infestations, 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. If mechanical removal is to continue after dieback of the plants, individual plants or clumps will need to be marked with some sort of stakes or flagging because it will be impossible to relocate the plants otherwise. When conducting mechanical removal, care should be taken to minimize soil disturbance as much as possible. For this reason, mechanical control may be inappropriate for large infestations in high quality natural areas.
- **Chemical-** It can be effectively controlled using any of several readily available general use herbicides such as glyphosate. Apply herbicide in late winter-early spring (March through May) when temperatures are 40° F or warmer. Follow label and state requirements.

**References:** [www.forestimages.org](http://www.forestimages.org), <http://plants.usda.gov>, [www.nps.gov/plants/alien](http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien), Czarapata, Elizabeth J. Invasive Plants of the Upper Midwest, An Illustrated Guide to their Identification and Control, 2005 p. 113