

Crown Vetch by Sally Cureton

Crown Vetch (*Coronilla varia*) is yet another one of those plants imported from Europe for a distinct purpose. And, it is yet one of those imported plants that has gotten out of hand. In the 1950's, it was planted along highways and water ways in an attempt to control erosion. Because it spreads rapidly, Crown Vetch is now prevalent throughout Virginia, as well as the northern two-thirds of the United States and into southern Canada.

It is actually a very attractive plant with pea-like pink and white flowers in clusters at the ends of stalks that may be from two to six feet long. The flowers bloom from June through August. As a member of the pea family (legume), it adds nitrogen to the soil and so is sometimes used as a green fertilizer crop. However, since it does spread so rapidly and grows very densely, it can quickly crowd out native plants. It multiplies not only by seed, but by a creeping root system and so can change the character of a natural area very quickly.

Although still sold commercially, it's use is strongly discouraged in many areas. Control of this invasive plant can be difficult. Found along roads, railroads and open fields, it prefers open sunlit areas, but has been found to thrive in partial shade also. Seeds from Crown Vetch can remain dormant for over fifteen years and still germinate and grow. In the Rockingham Springs Arboretum, we have found this plant at the entrance by the Spring House and in the Memory Garden. It is a challenge every year to pull out the many new shoots it generates.