

Crownvetch SEVA4

***Securigera varia* (L.) Lassen subsp. *orientalis* Jahn**

Synonyms: *Coronilla varia* L., purple crownvetch, crown vetch, trailing crown-vetch

From: Miller, James H. and Steve T. Manning. [working title] An Expanded Nonnative Invasive Plants of Southern Forests: A Field Guide for Identification and Control. Asheville, NC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Southern Research Station. DRAFT - August 2008

Family: Fabaceae (legume)

Plant. Deciduous, perennial forb sprawling to form tangled mats to 3 ft (92 cm) high or scrambling over rocks, shrubs, and small trees. Feathery, pinnately-compound leaves (similar to true vetch species [*Vicia* spp.] but lacking tendrils), alternate on slender reclining stems. In summer a multitude of showy, stemmed heads of white and pink flowers jut above entangled plants that yield tufts of slender seed pods in fall. One plant can cover 15 sq. ft (1.5 sq. meters) or more in a year from underground stems (rhizomes) with taproots. Forms brown, “earth hugging” patches in winter that resprout quickly in spring or remain green in southern areas.

Caution: All parts are poisonous to some degree.

Stem. Ascending to sprawling, green, slender and succulent but wiry, slightly angled, 20 to 80 inches (50 to 200 cm) long, with leaves and flower/seed stalks arising along the stem at regular intervals.

Leaves. Alternate, odd pinnately compound, 2 to 4 inches (5 to 10 cm) long, arising immediately from the stem with two tiny stipules. Leaflets 11 to 25, dark green, oblong to obovate, 0.3 to 0.8 inches (0.8 to 2 cm) long with minute hair-like tips.

Flowers. May to September. Small, multi-colored pea-type flowers with pink and purple or rose upper petals and white to pinkish-white lower keel petals, 5 to 25 flowers clustered in clover-like “crowns”, about one inch (2.5 cm) wide, jutting upward on thin axillary stalks, 2 to 6 inches (5 to 15 cm) long, above entangled plants.

Fruit and seeds. Present May to July and maturing in October. Radiating clusters of slender, pointed seed pods (loment), 2 to 4 inches (5 to 10 cm) long, light green maturing to brown. Segmented to divide and release 3 to 12 flattened brown seeds.

Ecology. Nitrogen fixer and pollinated by insects. Grows in full sun to light shade and the range of conditions common to the South. Tolerates drought, heavy precipitation, and cold temperatures. Planted on roadsides, surface mines, and in gardens, escaping into forest edges, openings, streamsides, and special habitats like rock outcroppings. Displaces plants to form monocultures. Spread by wildlife- and people-dispersed seeds while sediment buried plant parts along streams can root and grow. Seeds can germinate immediately after release or remain viable in the soil for several years. While reportedly poisonous, especially to horses, it is used for livestock forage. Deer eat crownvetch and it provides cover for rabbits and ground nesting birds.

Resemble the growth habit and leaves of vetches (*Vicia* spp.) that have tendrils at their leaf ends and scattered flowers, not in clusters like crownvetch.

History and use. Native to the Mediterranean area of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Widely planted across the northern two-thirds of the U.S. since 1950's for erosion control, pastures, surface mine reclamation, and ornamental ground cover using numerous cultivars.