

Don't Be Duped By This Beautiful Wildflower

By Shelly Funai, Grounds Manager

I love spring wildflowers! Who doesn't?! Any bit of fresh color in springtime is a welcome sign by everyone, and it is so much fun to see bulbs, perennials, and new tree buds emerge after a long winter. In a blog last year, I wrote about some spring wildflowers native to Ohio, mentioning some of my favorite spring ephemerals. Remember: ephemerals are the plants that come up early in spring and complete their whole life cycle in just one season. Meaning: they grow, flower, and set seed in (usually) about a month's time.

This year, my blog on wildflowers is focused on just one plant, **Lesser Celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*)** another spring ephemeral, but with some rather *annoying* characteristics.

Lesser Celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*) is a member of the buttercup family. *And this lovely little flower had me duped.* I would admire this nice patch of small, yellow flowers about an inch in diameter every year around mid-April. Was it a type of marsh marigold, since it was in a wetter location? I wasn't quite sure. Turns out, this is marsh marigold's dumb cousin (I think there is one in every family!).

In about 2015, a nice graduate student who had researched Lesser Celandine, sent me an email, informing me that what I had was an invasive plant that's starting to threaten our Ohio woodlands. Several email exchanges later, and I was educated on the threat of this invasive, along with some ways to control it.

Lesser Celandine is a low growing plant that comes out a little bit earlier than other wildflowers – an exasperating display of overarching boldness. Because the mat-forming foliage comes first, it can actually keep other plants from growing and literally smother them. It can even smother English ivy ground cover, as it did here at Stan Hywet. This is not a unique characteristic for invasives. Think about Japanese honeysuckle that is dappled throughout our woodlands, and how much earlier the foliage comes out- way before the foliage of oaks and maples that it's growing under. *This* is a survival mechanism of some invasive species, a way that they *excel* at taking over!

Lesser Celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*) has heart to spade-shaped, shiny leaves and yellow flowers with about 6 to 12 petals.



It gets worse. Lesser Celandine is clever, forming tubers and nutlets on the roots of the plant, so pulling it out of the ground often leaves behind that root nodule. Pulling it out by hand takes patience, persistence, and monitoring. Remove plants and all parts completely and put it in the trash, not your compost!



Lesser Celandine underground tubers and roots.

And as if this wasn't clever enough, Lesser celandine also forms *bulbils* in the axils of the leaves. Bulbils are like an aerial bulb and seed-like. It's another method of spreading; these bulbils can be accidentally carried off by animals or even spread by the lawn mower. This plant will form colonies in your lawn, especially if it is a wet and rather shady area.

In addition to careful and patient removal by hand, herbicides are another plan of control to use. Please read the labels carefully! Use broadleaf herbicides in lawn areas, and make sure temperatures are above 50 degrees. Also make sure to wear the correct personal protective gear.

There are two valuable lessons.

1) **Listen to each other and other professionals.** As disappointed as I was, I am grateful to the grad student that burst my bubble on the cute little yellow wild flowers that I loved so much. This pest had me hoodwinked into thinking I had something special! By reading the information and literature she had given me, I learned that it was not too late to control the small patch of weeds that I had. I have since seen other places that were heavily infested with Lesser Celandine and I just thought to myself "I'm glad I didn't let it get that far out of hand!"



A patch of Lesser Celandine in the lawn.

2) **Learn about the plants in your garden, and be cautious about what you purchase** for your garden: Lesser Celandine is sold as an ornamental in some states, although I have not seen it personally. Take care to remove what you can of invasive plants, especially aggressive types. *Your neighbors will be happier, too!*