



Lowbush Blueberry Fact Sheet

Sheep Sorrel

Rumex acetosella L.

Other names: Field sorrel, horse sorrel, red sorrel, sour grass, cow sorrel, toad sorrel, mountain sorrel

Description

Sheep sorrel may be a perennial, or sometimes an annual, and can be found from late May into the fall. It reproduces by seed or an extensive running root system. Leaves are primarily basal with fewer alternately arranged stem leaves. Sheep sorrel's basal leaves are long stalked, 2.5 - 7.5 cm long and have a distinctive arrowhead shape, with flaring lobes. The middle leaves are similar in shape to the lower leaves but are shorter stalked. The uppermost leaves have no stalks and do not have lobes. A thin membranous sheath (ocrea) surrounds the stem above the point of leaf attachment. Several slender, upright stems arise from one crown and grow from 15 - 45 cm high. The small flowers, in branched clusters, are green (female) or yellow (male) in early summer but change to red as they mature.



Sorrel in blueberries.

Economic Importance

Sheep sorrel is found in burnt lands, barrens and fields with low fertility. It grows in patches and spreads rapidly when competition from other plants is reduced or lacking. Sheep sorrel competes for resources with the lowbush blueberry as optimal growing conditions are similar. This, along with sheep sorrel's two effective methods of reproduction (seed and vegetative root), make it a problem in Nova Scotia blueberry fields. In most situations it does not negatively impact harvest efficiency as shallow roots are pulled easily. However, thick stands of sheep sorrel can cause problems with mechanical harvesters, by clogging the rake head. Also, it is a host for botrytis blight, serving as a source of infective spores within and outside blueberry fields.





Life Cycle

Sheep sorrel grows from seed producing a basal rosette. This in turn produces stems and flowers. Flowering occurs throughout the summer with male and female flowers found on different plants. Numerous rhizomes spread laterally from a tap root forming new rosettes. Overwintering buds are produced on the rhizome and will sprout early the following spring. Sheep sorrel may also act as an annual, emerging as a seedling, flowering to produce seed, and dying within one growing season.

Control Strategy

Sheep sorrel is susceptible to hexazinone (Velpar™/Pronone™) and atrazine. Late germinating seeds may establish in the sprout year and continue to cause problems in the crop year. Since it is a shallow rooted perennial, burning may result in moderate control of both the adult plant and seeds present on the soil surface.



Sheep-sorrel: (a) Mature plant, (b) young plant and rhizome, and (c) flower.

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