

DOVE'S FOOT

Just eat it

Dove's foot is an edible weed, with medicinal uses dating back to 1652 when Nicholas Culpeper described the healing qualities which included fixing wind colic, and external wounds such as sores and ulcers. Its praises continue with the extract of this plant in wine often being used to treat internal injuries. Julia Sich of Tauranga-based www.juliasedibleweeds.com uses the leaves in smoothies.

WHY IS IT A WEED?

Grows quickly, outcompetes pasture

WHERE IS IT FOUND?

Common weed of wasteland, grassland and open places

IS IT TOXIC?

No, it's edible

WHEN I FIRST started out identifying weeds in farmer's crops and pastures, I really struggled to identify dove's foot from two other weeds. As a result, this is the first in a series of three articles.

Dove's foot comes from a rather large clan. It is a member of the geranium family (*Geraniaceae*) and can also be referred to as Dove's foot cranesbill, awnless geranium or its Latin name, *Geranium molle*. Geranium is Greek for cranesbill (after the bird), with the fruit of the plant having the characteristics of the long beak and head.

Dove's foot is a small reaching plant, with the ability to grow up to 30cm in height, with multiple stems branching out from the base. The leaves form a base rosette, then go up on long stalks. Flowers are small and pink-purple.

This weed grows like a weed. It has the ability to quickly cover open spaces and grow along banks and hedges, but worse, it also successfully outcompetes pasture.



Photo: Harry Rose Wikimedia Commons

It prefers sunny places, and sandy and dry soils are its preference. This unwanted plant can also effectively grow up to an altitude of 1000 metres above sea level.

Dove's foot can either be an annual, flowering from June to September, or it can over-winter, developing a strong tap root as a result. Flowers are either violet or pink-purple, 5-8mm in width and are either in axillary pairs or terminal on shoots. Because of the weed's ability to readily reseed, it has a high probability of returning to your garden or pasture year after year.

How to control dove's foot

You could eat it, but if there's too much your options are simple. Dove's foot has quite a soft leaf without a waxy layer and you can use glyphosate, but you will need to add an extra ingredient known as a 'spike' to the mix to ensure control. Talk to your rural supply store about the best option, and always read the label. ■



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