

What does white clover look like?



White clover (*Trifolium repens*) is a perennial legume (related to peas and beans), originally from Europe which has become one of the most widely distributed legumes in the world. It is a creeping, low-growing plant with white clusters of flowers on long stalks; it is very commonly found in lawns. The most distinguishing feature of white clover is its adventitious roots, which emerge from runners (stolons) that snake along the ground and establish new growth from nodes. The leaves are composed of three leaflets which may have a “crescent” or “water mark” on the upper surface, and the three leaflets share one petiole.

How can I tell white clover from similar looking plants?

There are a few other species you may run across that can fool even the most diligent of clover hunters. Most confusion occurs when hunting for clover before flowering has begun. In this case, it is the leaves and the roots that must be paid particular attention to. Otherwise, you may believe you’ve found White Clover, when in fact, you have absconded with a close cousin!

For example:

Red Clover (*Trifolium pretense*)



Although different when flowering, notice how similar the leaves are. The biggest difference with red clover is that the leaflets grow directly under the flower on this species. Not so with white clover, where the flower grows by itself on a long stalk. Also, red clover lacks the creeping stems and adventitious roots described above. Instead, they emerge from what is called a “tap root.”

Creeping wood sorrel (*Oxalis corniculata*)



The leaflets of creeping wood sorrel are deeply lobed, heart shaped, and may be green to reddish purple. Creeping wood sorrel contains a slender taproot, and roots at nodes along slightly hairy stems. . The flowers are bright yellow

Black Medic (*Medicago lupulina*)



Stems grow straight, and are hairy, radiating out from the taproot. Compound leaves are alternate, with wedge- to oval-shaped leaflets. Leaflets have toothed margins, are widest at the apex, and have a projecting tip in the center of the leaf. The central leaflet is borne on a short stalk, while the lateral leaflets arise from the central petiole. Stipules are present at the base of the petioles.