

# Weed Snapshot: Showy Crotalaria

Barton Wilder

## History

Showy crotalaria (*Crotalaria spectabilis*), also known as showy rattlebox, is a common weed found throughout Alachua County. It is often located in pastures, roadsides and disturbed areas. A member of the legume family, it was originally brought over to the United States for use as a cover crop to help supply nitrogen in dry sandy soils found throughout the South (Maddox et al. 2001). One Alachua County resident remembers being a child in the 1920s. The county agricultural agent brought a sample of showy crotalaria seeds to plant on their farm for a cover crop demonstration. As expected, the showy crotalaria did exceptionally well in the dry, sandy soils. Unfortunately, showy crotalaria contains large amounts of toxic alkaloids, and the family lost several cows due to poisoning. Showy crotalaria quickly became a serious weed problem in the Southeast due to its prolific seed production and toxicity. It has been mistaken for a native wildflower and is often collected along the roadside for use in floral arrangements. This practice should be discouraged because cutting the flower stalks and disturbing the pods can accidentally spread the seeds.

## Identification

Showy crotalaria is a fast growing summer annual. Like all summer annuals, it germinates in the early spring, flowers in late summer, and set seeds and dies in the fall. Showy crotalaria has simple leaves that are large and waxy. It has yellow flowers that are born on a large, upright stalk. The flowers resemble those of a pea and are quite attractive hence showy being part of the weed's name. Its other common name, showy rattlebox, comes from its seed pods. The seed pods are short but thick, resembling Vienna sausages, and when dry, rattle profusely when shaken.

Showy crotalaria is toxic to all livestock including goats. The seeds contain the highest amount of toxins. Animals should be prevented from eating the leaves, too, because they contain enough of the alkaloids to be toxic. The leaves of showy crotalaria are toxic even when dried, so producers need to pay extra attention to keep this weed out of hay fields.

## Control options

Showy crotalaria can easily be controlled with several different herbicides. As a legume it is highly susceptible to the growth regulator herbicides such as 2,4-D, dicamba+2,4-D, triclopyr, and aminopyralid. Like all annuals, the best time to control showy crotalaria is in the seedling stage. Economical herbicides such as 2,4-D or 2,4-D+dicamba will provide good control of small showy crotalaria. As summer progresses and the weeds become larger, stronger herbicides such as

triclopyr, aminopyralid + 2,4-D, or triclopyr+fluroxypyr will have to be applied. Showy crotalaria should not be sprayed past the beginning of October. Summer annuals respond poorly to herbicide applications in the fall. The plants have already produced seed and are near the end of their life cycle and have stopped growing. Producers who are unable to spray may control crotalaria by mowing. Mowing is a more expensive control method compared to herbicide application and must be done prior to flower and seed production to limit seed dispersal.

### Herbicides

2,4-D (generic)	2-3 pints per acre
dicamba+2,4-D (generic)	2-3 pints per acre
aminopyralid + 2,4-D (GrazonNext H/L)	1.6 to 2 pints per acre
triclopyr (Remedy, Garlon, Element)	2 pints per acre
triclopyr+fluroxypyr (PastureGard)	2 pints per acre



Notice the brightly colored flowers and numerous seed pods. This image was taken in November.

To simplify information available, it is sometimes necessary to use trade names of products, equipment and firms. No endorsement is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products, equipment and firms not mentioned.

### **References**

Maddox V., R. Westbrooks, J. Byrd. 2001. *Showy Rattlebox*. Mississippi State Extension Service.  
[http://www.gri.msstate.edu/ipams/FactSheets/Showy\\_rattlebox.pdf](http://www.gri.msstate.edu/ipams/FactSheets/Showy_rattlebox.pdf)