



A Northern Arizona Homeowner's Guide To Identifying and Managing **MULLEIN**

Common name(s): Mullein, flannel mullein, wooly mullein

Scientific name: *Verbascum thapsus*

Family: Figwort family (Scrophulariaceae)

Reasons for concern: This is a pioneer plant in forest environments that have been burned or seriously disturbed. They can help hold soil in place until native plants and grasses return, but they are not eaten by wildlife. Especially in home landscapes, their large rosettes and leaves can prevent the growth of desirable native plants and grasses reducing native plant diversity.

Classification: Non-native

Botanical description: Tall, erect, fuzzy herbaceous plant.

Leaves: Large, thick rosette of fuzzy leaves in the first year. Alternate, sometimes overlapping along the flowering stalks. Much larger toward the base of the plant. Bluish gray-green and felt-like, ranging from 4 to 12 inches in length and 1 to 5 inches in width.

Stem(s): Single, tall, erect, flowering stalks grow 5 to 10 feet high, including flowering stalk. Dried stem usually persists in winter.

Flowers: Yellow flowers with 5 yellow petals, borne on a large spike. Flowers bloom a few at a time from April through September.

Seeds: Produces a huge number of tiny seeds, which are pitted and rough with wavy ridges and deep grooves.

Roots: Fairly shallow taproots.

Native to: Asia



Mullein habit. Image credit: Max Licher, swbiodiversity.org/seinet

Where it grows: Prefers dry, sandy or gravelly soils. Widespread in meadows, desert scrublands, woodlands and pine forests, where there are sunlit openings from 3,000 to 9,500 feet. Intolerant of shade.

Life cycle: Biennial. Basal rosette forms the first year. Bolts, flowers and dies in the second year.

Reproduction: By seed

Weedy characteristics: The average plant can produce 100,000 to 200,000 seeds, which can remain viable after lying dormant in the soil for several decades, even up to 100 years. Large numbers of seedlings can appear after a disturbance, such as logging, tilling or forest fire. Requires little moisture to germinate. Can overtake a site in a short period of time.

Control strategies: Shallow roots make them easy to hand pull. Pull or dig them out as small rosettes. Step down any loose soil after the plant is removed. Early in the season, if a plant has produced a stem, dig or pull out the plant. If it is late in the season and the plant has flowered or even produced seeds, you can dig out the entire plant, or you may want to cut off the flower head or seed head to save time. Be sure to hold the flower head upright, so the seeds don't drop out. Bag the flower or seed head. You may want to leave the rest of the plant until the following spring, or cut it off and leave it on the ground. Reduce available bare ground by sowing native grasses and plants. Frequently monitor previous infestations for new growth.

Images:



Mullein flower. Image credit: Max Licher, swbiodiversity.org/seinet



Mullein bolts the second year. Image credit: Max Licher, swbiodiversity.org/seinet



Mullein basal rosette. Image credit: Patrick Alexander, swbiodiversity.org/seinet

References:

- **Weed of the Week: Woolly Mullein (video)** Coconino County Extension
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8MsVo2HgNA>
- **Common Mullein** Plant Conservation Alliance's Alien Plant Working Group
<https://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/veth1.htm>
- **A Northern Nevada Homeowner's Guide to Identifying and Managing Common Mullein**
University of Nevada Cooperative Extension
<https://extension.unr.edu/publication.aspx?PubID=3398>
- **Common Mullein** Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health
<https://www.invasive.org/browse/subinfo.cfm?sub=3080>

<https://nazinvasiveplants.org>

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Jeffrey C. Silvertooth, Associate Dean & Director, Economic Development & Extension, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, The University of Arizona. The University of Arizona is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution. The University prohibits discrimination in its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or genetic information and is committed to maintaining an environment free from sexual harassment and retaliation.