

Weed Information Sheet:

common mullein

Verbascum thapsus

Identification:

Scrophulariaceae (Figwort family)

Common Biennial forb

Height: 36-96" Width: 12-24"

Leaf Arrangement: basal

Flower: Yellow

Blooms: Mid-summer

Fruit: Capsule

Fall Color: Green

First year mullein plants are low-growing rosettes with light-green, densely pubescent leaves which have the texture of velvet. Plants bolt into maturity the second year, attaining a height of 3 to 8 ft. and have alternate, overlapping, felt-like leaves. Pale yellow flowers bloom from the base to the tip of a tall spike from June to August. The stiff stalks of larger plants can continue to flower into October, and often stay standing well into winter.



common mullein

Verbascum thapsus

AKA: backpackers toilet paper



Description & Impact:

A medicinal herb that was brought over from Europe in the mid-1700s, mullein is a biennial plant in the figwort family. It was originally introduced in Virginia for use as a piscicide (fish pesticide) and spread quickly throughout the United States. The plant is now commonly found on weedy lots, roadsides and disturbed sites where it adapts easily to a wide variety of site conditions. It is especially aggressive when growing in dry, sandy or rocky conditions. Due to its considerable size and prolific seed production, even a handful of mullein plants can dominate a site quickly. The seeds can persist in the ground and remain viable for decades, so this species is difficult to eradicate once established. It is of no value as wildlife forage due to the soft, fine hairs on the leaves. However this same quality has given rise to the nickname “backpackers toilet paper” since its soft leaves can come in very handy in a time of need.

Control Methods:

Manual Removal: Due to its relatively shallow tap roots, small numbers of these plants can often be easily dug or pulled out in loose soil. For larger individuals, cut the root below the soil surface, then remove the entire plant. This should be done prior to seed development. If seed capsules are present, cut entire seed head and immediately place it into a bag and remove from site. It is important to minimize soil disturbance since loose soil can facilitate mullein seed germination.

You can also ‘harvest’ the seed of mullein to remove it from the site. Wait until the plant begins to die back at the base, but the flower/seed head is still green. Use pruners to cut the stem just below the fruiting stalk, then carefully drop the seed head in a plastic bag, and dispose of in the trash.

Mechanical: Mullein may also be mowed repeatedly to prevent stalk from flowering. However, if mowing is discontinued, a much larger basal rosette will regrow with additional branching and higher quantities of flowers and seeds.

Chemical: Young mullein rosettes can be killed with a foliar spray of glyphosate solution (RoundUp®, etc.) and its large leaves make for excellent chemical absorption. However, the herbicide must be applied with enough pressure to penetrate the thick hairs on the leaves. A broadleaf specific herbicide containing triclopyr (Garlon®) is an effective alternative if native or other desirable grasses are present. A surfactant additive is essential for successful application due to the hairy surface of the leaves.

Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and always apply according to the instruction on the product label.

Revegetation Recommendations: Along with early prevention and minimizing seed production, a good measure to reduce the spread of mullein is to provide a competitive, diverse, productive native plant community. Sowing affected sites with native prairie grass and forb seed mix can reduce mullein distribution. Contact us for specific recommendations.

Citations:

Weed Information Sheet:



dense-flower mullein

Verbascum densiflorum

Scrophulariaceae (Figwort family)

Identification:

Common Biennial forb

Height:

Width:

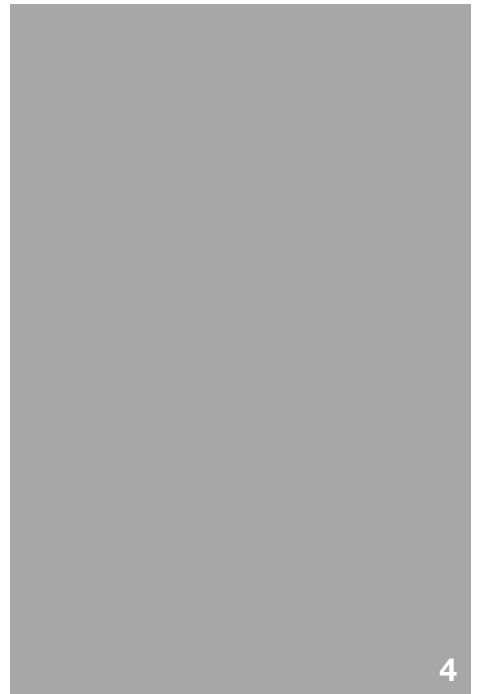
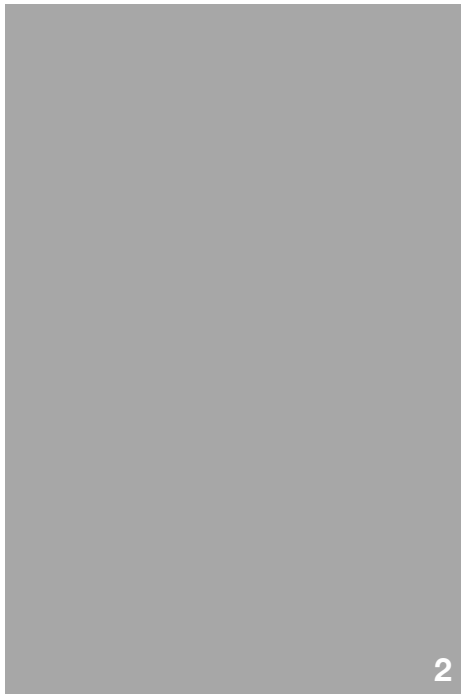
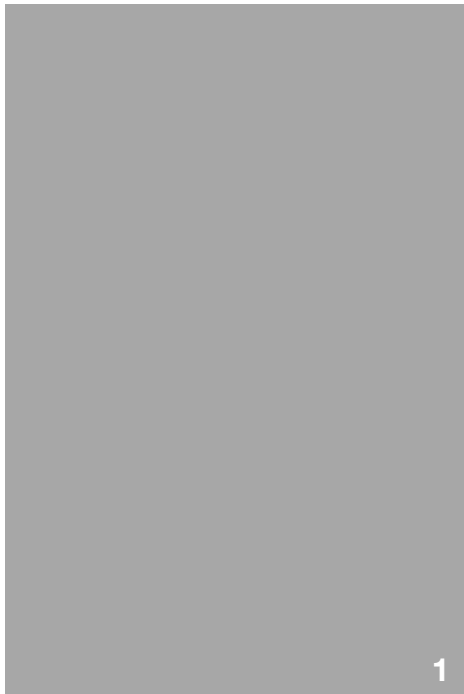
Leaf Arrangement:

Flower:

Blooms: Mid-spring

Fruit:

Fall Color:



Weed Information Sheet:



RED HEAD Ecological
Consulting

dense-flower mullein

Verbascum densiflorum

AKA:

Description & Impact:

Control Methods:

Citations:

Updated: 3/13/2026