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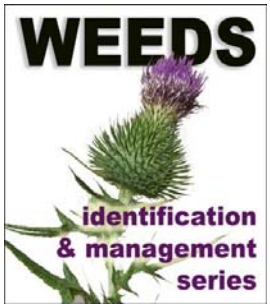

A Northern Nevada Homeowner's Guide to Identifying and Managing Common Mullein

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Other common names: Wooly mullein

Scientific name: *Verbascum thapsus*

Family: Scrophulariaceae

Description: A tall plant with pale fuzzy leaves and long flowering stalks, common mullein grows in a rosette (ground-hugging form) in the first year, and then as a tall, flowering plant in the second year.

- **Leaves:** Hairy, felt-like and pale green to silvery in color; range from 4 to 12 inches or more in length. Leaves are larger below and smaller higher up on the stem.
- **Stems:** Produces a single large stem up to 6 or more feet tall.
- **Flowers:** Yellow with 5 petals; up to an inch in diameter. Flowers open randomly along the branched flower spikes. Blooms from summer to fall.
- **Roots:** Has a bulky but somewhat shallow taproot.

Native to: Asia; came to the United States via Europe; naturalized throughout the United States

Where it grows: Pastures, meadows, vacant lots and other disturbed or unmanaged sites. Mullein is well-suited to gravelly soils and will grow in both moist and dry sites.

Life cycle: Biennial (flowers and dies in the second year)

Reproduction: Reproduces by seed

Typical plant growing in disturbed site.

Rosettes have soft, fuzzy or wooly leaves.

Control methods: Common mullein is a prolific seed-producer, and a single plant can result in a large infestation the following year. Plants are most easily removed when they are small seedlings or rosettes.

Mechanical: Dig, hoe or pull young seedlings. Plants are easy to pull. Use mechanical control methods prior to formation of flowers and seeds. If the flower stalk is cut, a plant will grow new stalks and flower again, so this is not an effective method of control.

Cultural: Plant desirable vegetation that will shade the area and reduce germination and growth of young plants.

Biological: The mullein seed-eating weevil, *Gymnetron tetrum*, has been used successfully in some parts of the United States. Permits are required to introduce biological controls from other areas. Livestock do not eat mullein because of its fuzzy leaves.

Chemical: Apply broadleaf-selective herbicides on young plants. Add a surfactant according to label directions to aid uptake by the fuzzy leaves.

References:

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Remelay, T. 2005. Common Mullein. Plant Conservation Alliance's Alien Plant Working Group, http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/veth1.htm.

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The leaves are large with prominent veins. In the first year, mullein grows in a rosette (ground-hugging form), shown here.

Flowers are yellow and open randomly along the flower stalk.

(***All photos by S. Donaldson***)

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