

Woolly Mullien

Verbascum thapsus

Woolly mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) is a biennial herb with distinctive, thick, silvery-grey, fuzzy leaves and tall yellow flower spikes, often reaching 1–2 meters in height. It acts as a significant weed in disturbed, dry, or poor-quality soils along roadsides, pastures, and waste areas. Known for its incredible seed longevity, with seeds remaining viable for over 100 years, this invasive plant is best controlled by manually removing the root system or cutting off flowering stems to prevent further infestation.

Identification

Leaves (First Year): A large basal rosette (up to 30 inches across) of silvery-green leaves covered in thick, soft, woolly hairs, often described as felt-like or like a blanket.

Stem (Second Year): A single, thick, rigid, and hairy bolt that grows from the center of the rosette, producing smaller, alternate leaves that appear "winged" as they taper down the stem.

Flowers: Yellow, 5-petaled flowers (approx. 30mm across) grow in a dense, elongated, spike-like cluster at the top of the stalk, flowering from July to April.

Roots: Deep, stout taproot with secondary, fibrous roots.

Seeds: Produces numerous small, brown,, deeply grooved seeds inside 2-chambered capsules that often persist through winter.

Habitat: Thrives in poor, rocky, or heavily disturbed soils, including pastures, roadsides, and waste places.

Distinction: The densely woolly, thick, felt-like foliage is the most distinct feature, setting it apart from other weeds.

Control

Hand Pulling/Digging: Effective for small infestations. Remove the entire taproot with a spade or mattock, particularly in early spring.

Cutting: In the second year, cut the flowering stalk below the lowest flowers to prevent seed production, but be aware this may not kill the plant completely.

Timing: The best time to remove plants is before they flower, as a single plant can produce hundreds of thousands of seeds.

Herbicides: Glyphosate: (100ml/10L water) Apply to rosettes. **2,4-D:** Effective on young, actively growing plants. Triclopyr/Aminopyralid (e.g., Tordon): Effective for pasture, usually applied before bolting.

