



# Common Mullein *Verbascum thapsus* L.

**Common Names:** big taper, common mullein, flannel mullein, flannel plant, great mullein, mullein, velvet dock, velvet plant, woolly mullein

**Native Origin:** Asia and Europe

**Description:** An erect biannual herb in the figwort family (*Scrophulariaceae*) growing 5 to 10 feet in height. In the first year it produces a low vegetative rosette up to 24 inches in diameter, remains thought the winter, then produces a stout flowering stem in the succeeding growing season. The stem is densely woolly with branched hairs. Leaves are alternate, oblong-obovate to obovate-lanceolate, blue-grey green, woolly and 4-16 inches long including the petiole. Leaves become progressively smaller up the flowering stem. Flowers are sessile (attached to stem), borne in long terminal spikes, bright yellow, 5 fused petals, and 1 inch in diameter. Plants die after flowering. Fruits are woolly oval capsules that split open when mature releasing 100,000 to 180,000 seeds from the parent plant. Seeds are dispersed by wind and animals, and may remain viable in the soil for over 100 years. It reproduces solely by seed. The root system is comprised of a deep taproot and fibrous roots.



**Habitat:** Common mullein occurs in areas with an average annual precipitation of 20-60 inches and a 140-day growing season. It is usually abundant on well-drained soils with pH 6.5 to 7.8. It prefers dry sandy soils but can grow in chalk and limestone. It can be found in neglected meadows, forest openings, pastures, fence rows, roadsides, and industrial areas.

**Distribution:** This species is reported from states shaded on Plants Database map. It is reported invasive in AZ, CA, CO, CT, HI, ID, IL, MO, NJ, NV, OH, OR, PA, SD, TN, VA, WA, WI, WV, and WY.

**Ecological Impacts:** Once established it grows quickly to form a dense ground cover. It can overtake and displace native species. At the high densities, it appears to prevent establishment of native herbs and grasses following fires or other disturbances.

## Control and Management:



- **Manual-** Hand pull before seed set, bag and dispose of plants to prevent spread
- **Chemical-** It can be effectively controlled using any of several readily available general use herbicides such as glyphosate or triclopyr. For some sites, applications can be made during the early spring when most other non-target vegetation is dormant. Follow label and state requirements.
- **Biological control-** Two insects that have possible biological control implications for common mullein are European curculionid weevil (*Gymnaetron tetrum*) and mullein moth (*Cucullia verbasci*).

**References:** [www.forestimages.org](http://www.forestimages.org), <http://plants.usda.gov>, [www.nps.gov/plants/alien/list/a.htm](http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/list/a.htm), [www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/veth1.htm](http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/veth1.htm), [www.ppws.vt.edu/scott/weed\\_id/vesth.htm](http://www.ppws.vt.edu/scott/weed_id/vesth.htm), <http://tncweeds.ucdavis.edu/esadocs/documnts/verbtha.html>, <http://www.colostate.edu/Depts/SoilCrop/extension/CEPEP/profiles/common%20mullein.pdf>, [http://akweeds.uaa.alaska.edu/pdfs/species\\_bios\\_pdfs/Species\\_bios\\_VETH.pdf](http://akweeds.uaa.alaska.edu/pdfs/species_bios_pdfs/Species_bios_VETH.pdf)