



Whatcom Weeds

Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board 901 W. Smith Road Bellingham WA 98226
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ABSINTH WORMWOOD

Artemisia absinthium

THREAT: Absinth wormwood, a native of the Mediterranean area, was introduced into the United States in the 1800s, and has since escaped cultivation and naturalized in many areas. This plant has been grown both for ornamental and medicinal purposes; it has been used as a medicinal plant and an insect discouraging plant since antiquity. An oil produced from the young flower heads is used to produce absinth, although liquor made with this substance is no longer legal in many countries (artificial flavoring is now often used in this liqueur, due to the poisonous and addictive properties of the chemical derived from the plant). All parts of the plant are considered poisonous and can cause brain damage and death if taken in large enough quantities. Absinth wormwood also has hallucinogenic properties. If eaten by dairy cattle, this plant will taint the taste of the milk. Absinth wormwood grows on a wide variety of soils, preferring well-drained sites. It is found on disturbed sites in grasslands, croplands and pastures, as well as along roads, fencelines and on abandoned land. It is allelopathic, exuding chemicals that discourage the growth of other plants. Large quantities of small seeds are produced, with the seed remaining viable for 3 to 4 years. Seed can be dispersed by wind, water and animals. The plant can also regenerate from root fragments.

DESCRIPTION: Absinth wormwood is a perennial herb, related to sagebrush. Multiple branching stems regrow yearly from a woody base, often giving the plant a shrubby appearance. Absinth wormwood can grow up to 5 feet tall, but is usually about 3 feet tall and 2 feet across. It has a taproot with shallow lateral branches. The olive green leaves are covered with fine silky hairs, which gives the plant a grayish appearance. The leaves are 2 to 5 inches long, and are divided into deeply lobed leaflets. Flowers are borne on stalks that grow from the upper leaf nodes. The yellowish-gray flowers are small and inconspicuous and flowering occurs from early summer to early August. Absinth wormwood is strongly aromatic.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Absinth wormwood can be controlled through mechanical and chemical means. Small infestations can be dug by hand, if care is taken to remove as much as the root as possible. Tillage can be used to control absinth wormwood. However, plants may be able to sprout from root fragments after tillage, so work may need to be repeated. Repeated mowing can be used to prevent seed production, but the plants will not be killed. Contact the weed board for site-specific chemical recommendations.

