

ABSINTH WORMWOOD

(*Artemisia absinthium*)

Description: Absinth wormwood, also known as American or common wormwood, mugwort or madder wort, and wormwood sage, is a member of the Asteraceae family.

Absinth wormwood is a herbaceous perennial with a strong sage odor. The plant is commonly 3 feet tall at maturity but can grow to over 5 feet. Leaves are 2 to 5 inches long, divided two or three times into deeply lobed leaflets and are light to olive green in color. Leaves and stems of the plant are covered with fine silky hairs that give the plant a grayish appearance. Stems are also woody at the base of the plant. Flower stalks appear at each upper leaf node and produce numerous yellow flower heads that are 1/8 inch in diameter. Absinth wormwood seed is less than 1/16 long, smooth, flat, and light gray-brown in color.



Absinth wormwood

Absinth wormwood is considered a noxious weed under North Dakota state law, thus landowners are required to eradicate or control the spread of the plant.

Plant Images:



Young plant



Rosette leaves



Stems

Distribution and Habitat: Absinth wormwood is native to Eurasia and has now established across the northeastern United States, the Midwest, the Great Plains, and Canada. The plant can be found in both dry and moist soils. Absinth wormwood is generally found on dry soils in pastures, cropland, farmsteads, shelterbelts, roadsides, fence rows, and waste areas. There have also been reports that the plant prefers an abundant supply of moisture to thrive. Therefore, absinth wormwood can occur in areas associated with above-average moisture levels.

Life History/Ecology: Absinth wormwood is a herbaceous perennial that reproduces primarily through seed production, but can also spread by short roots. The plant is a prolific seed producer with seedlings emerging anytime from late spring to early fall. Seeds may remain viable for 3 to 4 years. A rosette is formed by the end of the first growing season. Plants generally begin to grow in late April or early May and begin to flower from late July to early August. The above-ground portion of the plant dies in the late fall and the crown of the plant can produce buds that give rise to new shoots each spring. Seedlings produce several small leaves close to the soil surface that may go unnoticed in areas with good grass cover.

Absinth wormwood has been reported to taint the milk of cattle that graze on the plant. Absinth wormwood may also release allelopathic substances.

History of Introduction: Absinth wormwood is native to Europe, Northern Africa, and Northern Asia. The plant was introduced in North America in the early 19th century for medicinal and social purposes. By 1841, absinth wormwood had escaped cultivated gardens and was found along roadsides and on waste grounds. Absinth wormwood has primarily established in the northeastern region of the United States but can occasionally be found as far south as North Carolina. The plant is also found in the Midwest in Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin and Minnesota and the Great Plains regions in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Montana. Absinth wormwood was added to the North Dakota noxious weed list in 1971. By 1973, the plant had infested 42 of 53 counties in North Dakota. Currently, absinth wormwood is found extensively throughout North Dakota and has been reported in all counties.

Effects of Invasion: Absinth wormwood will quickly establish in disturbed areas where there is little plant competition. However, the plant will also out-compete desirable forbs and grasses in pastures, fields, and native grasslands, thus reducing biodiversity.

Control:

Absinth wormwood generally is not considered a serious problem on well-established or maintained pastures and rangelands. The plant tends to primarily invade over-grazed or disturbed areas where there is little competition from other plant species. Therefore, the best control measure for absinth wormwood is prevention. Management should include proper grazing and rotational grazing techniques that would maintain rangelands and prevent invasion of the plant. Disturbed areas should be re-seeded with desirable species to prevent spread of absinth wormwood.

Mechanical - Tillage can prevent establishment of absinth wormwood in crop production areas. Mowing may prevent seed production if mowed several times throughout the growing season, but mowing may be difficult in fence rows or rocky areas. Burning may not be an effective control method for absinth wormwood as infestations are not reduced and may increase. In a study in South Dakota, absinth wormwood survived and resprouted following an initial prescribed burn. However, absinth wormwood populations were reduced after four consecutive annual spring burns.

Chemical - Several herbicides are available for absinth wormwood control. Clopyralid, dicamba, picloram, glyphosate, and 2,4-D have been used to control infestations. These herbicides can successfully control absinth wormwood if applied when the plant is at least 12 inches tall and in the active growing stage. Better residual control the following spring is achieved when herbicides are applied to absinth wormwood from late June until mid-August. Applying herbicides from late June until mid-August can achieve effective residual control the following spring.

Contact your local county extension agent for recommended use rates, locations and timing.

Biological - No biological control agents are available for absinth wormwood control.

References:

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- Absinth wormwood photograph courtesy of JC Schou, Biopix.dk.
- Young plant photograph courtesy of Stevens County Noxious Weed Control Board, Washington.
- Rosette leaves and stems photograph courtesy of North Dakota State University, NDSU Extension Service.