

Mullein

Verbascum thapsus

Family: Scrophulariaceae

by: Molly Wood



Common names: Velvet plant, blanket leaf, candlewick, punchon, gordolobo, Indian toilet paper, flannel flower

Mullein grows abundantly in parts of the southwest above 5,000', including the northern parts of Arizona, such as Flagstaff and the White Mountains. It's easily identified and is a curious addition to sunny landscapes. The basal leaves of the plant are soft to the touch and the flower stocks make a pronounced, phallic presentation with their little yellow buds. I've seen the plant my entire life and have always been curious about it. I remember exploring outside as a kid and picking the furry leaves to feel and play with, even as an adult I'll pick the basal leaves of the plant and rub them between my fingers, a little bit like a worry stone. It's can be used as toilet paper when out camping. The yellow flowers of mullein mark my favorite time of summer, I've seen it on many road trips through New Mexico and up into Colorado during the late summer months.



Mullein is biennial, flowering in its second year. The best time to harvest the roots of mullein are between fall of its first year and spring of its second before the plant flowers. Michael Moore suggests harvesting the flowers individually off of the plant despite how time consuming it is. He refers to it as Mullein Yoga. The stock may be cut off to harvest flowers later but they should be harvested the same day. As for the leaves of the plant, according to Michael Moore, the large basal leaves of the second year are the best quality.

Environment: Mullein grows above 5,000' between juniper/pinon and ponderosa belts in disturbed and recently burned earth. The plant will be quite prolific the first year after a fire, each subsequent year the plants will be less abundant. Though the plant is not native it is not considered invasive.

Preparation: Making an oil infusion with the flowers is recommended for earaches. The leaf can be tinctured. A tea can be made of the dry roots by decoction, simmer for at least 30 minutes. The dried leaves can be smoked to relieve spasmodic coughing.

Notes on Processing: If the mullein leaf is to be dried it should be washed and then have the excess water squeezed out. If drying for a smoking blend, remove the stems before drying otherwise dry normally on screens. According to Mike Masek, a double maceration of the fresh plant leaves is necessary.

If making an oil for earaches, fill a container with the dried flowers and cover with olive oil. Let sit for a 3+ weeks and strain. Put 2-5 drops in ear at night.

To dry the roots of plant, wash and dry after harvesting. Then cut the root into thin slices and let dry on a screen or well ventilated surface.



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Energetics: The root is warming, astringent and bitter; the leaves and flowers are cooling, astringent and bitter.

Therapeutic uses: dry coughs, incontinence, earache (external), mild sedative for lungs, good for the early stages of a lung infection. A tea from the flowers have some evidence to be effective against the herpes simplex virus.

Herbal pairs and combos: add licorice or marshmallow root to the tea for a dry cough.

Contraindications: In general, mullein is a safe herb. The fine hair on the leaves may cause skin or throat irritation. Pour tea through a coffee filter if this happens.

Dosing guidelines: Since it's nontoxic it can be consumed liberally. Tinctures: take 30-90 drops up to 4x daily. For ear oil, place 2-5 drops in the ears at bed time.

References:

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