



Whatcom Weeds

Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board 322 N. Commercial St Bellingham WA 98225
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VELVETLEAF

Abutilon theophrasti

THREAT: Velvetleaf, a plant native to Eurasia, was introduced to North America as a potential fiber crop in the mid-eighteenth century. It has become a major weed in corn and soybeans, particularly in the Midwestern United States, but also invades gardens, fencerows, waste areas and other crops. Mature plants can produce up to 17,000 seeds. The seeds can remain viable in the soil for over 50 years and contain a chemical that can inhibit the germination of some seeds of other plants. The seedlings are vigorous and mature rapidly. Velvetleaf is shade tolerant so seeds can be produced under the canopy of a crop.



DESCRIPTION: Velvetleaf, a tap rooted member of the mallow family, is an erect summer annual. It grows 1 to 8 feet tall, with multiple branches in the top part of the plant. The leaves are broad, heart-shaped and large, up to 12 inches wide. The leaves grow on long, slender stalks, which are borne alternately on the stem. Both the leaves and stems are covered with velvety hairs, which give the plant a soft feel. The flowers are yellow to yellow-orange and are borne singly in the leaf axils. They have five petals and are about ½ to 1 inch in diameter. The seeds are small, purplish-black and kidney-shaped. They are borne in pods, 12-15 of which are grouped together in a cup-shaped capsule.

CONTROL: Once established, velvetleaf can be difficult to eradicate, due to the longevity of the seeds. If a new infestation is found, it is very important to prevent seed fall. Mechanical and chemical methods are effective in controlling velvetleaf. Since it is an annual, pulling is effective for smaller infestations. Repeated cutting and cultivating can also be used to control the plant and prevent seed formation. Contact the weed board for site-specific chemical recommendations.



Photos courtesy of the Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board