

VELVETLEAF *(Abutilon theophrasti Medic)*

INTRODUCTION

Velvetleaf, also known as elephant-ear or Indian mallow, was introduced from either China or India for commercial fibre production. While velvetleaf is now widespread throughout North America, the entire North American population of velvetleaf may have been introduced from a single plant. In BC, it was known only from the Lower Fraser Valley prior to 2005.

In 2005, several small patches and isolated plants of velvetleaf were identified in and around the community of Oliver, BC. It is suspected that birds facilitated the spread of these isolated plants, however the original seed source is unknown. All known local velvetleaf occurrences were immediately controlled and will be monitored for several years.

Velvetleaf is extremely competitive. Even under competition it is known to have high seedling vigour, rapid growth habit, tolerance to many herbicides and high seed production. The roots can also block fungal growth by exuding a protective chemical. In combination, these characteristics allow velvetleaf to spread easily and dominate desirable vegetation.

Velvetleaf occurs only at low elevations. In the United States, it is common to cultivated fields where it is a serious crop pest, particularly in corn, sorghum, milo and spring wheat.

REPORT INFESTATIONS

Contact the RDOS Invasive Plant Program
Coordinator at 250-492-0237 or
Toll Free at 1-877-610-3737

IDENTIFICATION

- Taprooted annual
- Grows from 0.3 - 2.4 m tall
- Small yellow 5-petalled flowers
- Entire plant covered in short, soft, velvety hairs
- Large heart-shaped leaves, 7.5 - 20 cm wide



BIOLOGY

Velvetleaf begins flowering in late June and continues through October. Reproduction is entirely by seed. A single plant may produce up to 1,700 seeds that may remain viable for over 50 years.

Seeds are grey-brown and contained in disk segments arranged on the plant fruit. They have hard coats that contain bacteria and tannin-like compounds to protect from infection. Seeds germinate throughout the growing season.



INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT

The most effective method of control for velvetleaf is to prevent establishment through proper land management. The healthier the natural plant community, the less susceptible it will be to velvetleaf invasion. Integrated management will require a combination of prevention, mechanical control and herbicides. Monitor your property annually for new infestations of velvetleaf. If velvetleaf is identified on your property, contact the RDOS Invasive Plant Program Coordinator and destroy plants immediately.

PREVENTION

- Maintain your property in a healthy, vigorous condition to ensure a productive plant community; competitive perennial plants utilize water and nutrients that would otherwise be readily available to velvetleaf.
- Regularly patrol your property for velvetleaf plants and immediately control new infestations.
- Cooperate with adjacent landowners and encourage them to control velvetleaf and other invasive plants.
- Immediately re-vegetate disturbed soils with a suitable seed mixture that provides dense, early colonization to prevent weed invasion.
- Check seed mixes for contaminants and use only certified seed.
- Be aware of other seed sources that may be contaminated, including wildflower seed and birdseed. Purchase local mixtures to help prevent the introduction of a new invasive plant to the region.

PHYSICAL CONTROL

Small isolated infestations of velvetleaf should be hand pulled. For larger infestations, cutting or mowing plants after flowering but before seed-set should eliminate the current year seed production. Infested areas should be monitored to ensure no new plants arise from the seedbed.

For further information on invasive plants in BC check out the website: www.weedsbc.ca For more information about the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen Invasive Plant Program call 250-492-0237 or toll free at 1-877-610-3737. Information is also available on our website at: www.rdos.bc.ca

